

Monergism

# ON KEEPING THE HEART



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# Keeping the Heart

by John Flavel

"Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life."  
Proverbs 4:23

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## **THE EPISTLE DEDICATORY**

To my dearly beloved and longed for, the Flock of Jesus Christ in Dartmouth, over whom the Holy Ghost hath made me an Overseer: Sound Judgment, true Zeal, and unstained Purity, are heartily wished.

My dear Friends,

THERE are three sad sights with which our eyes should continually affect our hearts: The first, is to behold in every place so many profane and dissolute ones, who bear the very image of Satan: the face of whose conversation plainly discovers what they are, and whither they are going, Philip. 3:18, 19. These look like themselves, the children of wrath. The second is to see so many cursed hypocrites artificially disguising themselves, and with marvellous dexterity acting the parts of saints, so that even a judicious eye may sometimes mistake the similar workings of the Spirit on them, for his saving workings on others: To hear such a person conferring, praying, bewailing his corruptions, and talking of his experiences; would easily persuade a man to believe that he hath the heart, as well as the face of a sincere Christian: For,

*Sic oculos, sic ille manus, sic ora ferebat.*

So the people of God do speak, so they pray, and even so they open their conditions: These look like saints, but are none. The third is to see so many real saints, in whom the spirit of truth is, who yet, through the impetuous workings of their corruptions, and neglecting of the watch over their hearts, do often fall into such scandalous practices, that they look like hypocrites, though they are not so.

These are three sad sights indeed, and O that my head were waters, and mine eyes fountains of tears, that I may weep abundantly over them all!

For the first, I would mourn heartily, considering that they (so continuing) must be damned eternally, 2 Thess. 1:8, 9. 1 Cor. 6:9.

For the second, I would both weep and tremble, considering that they (so abiding) must be damned doubly, Matth. 24:51.

And for the third no less than any of the rest, because, though they themselves may, and shall be saved, yet their examples make fast the bonds of death upon both the former, Matth. 18:7. 2 Sam. 12:13, 14.

Alas! that ever they should shed the blood of others souls, for whom Christ shed his own blood! That ever they should be cruel to others who have found Christ so kind to them! I know they dare not do it directly and intentionally, but so it proves occasionally and eventually. Suffer me here to digress a little, and expostulate with these prejudiced and hardened souls, I will presently return to you again. O why do you mischief your own souls by other men's examples? Because they stumble and break their shins, will you fall and break your necks? I desire all such as harden themselves by these things, and take up a good opinion of their own deplorable condition, would soberly consider, and answer these three queries.

## Queries

**Query 1.** Doth religion any way countenance or patronize the sinful practices of its professors? Or doth it not rather impartially and severely condemn them?

It is the glory of the Christian religion, that it is pure and undefiled, Jam. 1:27. No doctrine so holy, Psal. 19:8. Nor doth any make more provision for an holy life, Tit. 2:11, 12. Indeed there is a case wherein we may charge the evil practices of men upon their principles, but that is when their practices naturally flow from, and necessarily follow their principles: As for example, if I see a Papist sin boldly, I may charge it upon his principles, for they set pardons to sale, and so make way for looseness. If I see an Arminian slight the grace of God, and proudly advance himself, I may cry shame upon his principles, which directly lead to it: But can I do so where such practices are

condemned and provided against by their own avowed principles, who commit them?

**Query 2.** Is it not a most irrational thing to let fly at religion because of the scandalous ways of some, whilst, in the mean time, you wholly slight and over-look the holy and heavenly conversation of many others?

Are all that profess godliness loose and careless in their lives? No, some are an ornament to their profession, and the glory of Christ: And why must the innocent be condemned with the guilty? Why the eleven for one Judas?

**Query 3.** If you condemn religion because of the scandalous lives of some that profess it, must you not then cast off all religion in the world, and turn down-right atheists? Surely this is the consequent of it: For what religion is there, but some that profess it walk contrary to their profession? And then, as Constantine told the Novatian, you must set up a ladder, and go to heaven by yourself.

But alas! it is not our printed apologies for religion, but the visible reformations of its professor, that must both salve its honour, and remove those fatal stumbling-blocks at which the blind world strikes and falls into eternal perdition.

Now there are two ways by which this may be effected: First, By convincing the consciences of professors of their miscarriages, and the evil aggravations of them. Secondly, By medicating the heart, and cleansing the fountain whence they proceed. In the first of these, a worthy and eminent servant of Christ hath lately laboured, holding a clear gospel-glass before the faces of professors, which truly represents their spots and blemishes: If he that reads it will consider, apply, and practise, it shall doubtless turn to his salvation; but if it turn to no good account to him that reads it, I know it shall turn to a testimony for him that wrote it. The second is a principal design of this small treatise, the subject whereof is exceedingly weighty, and of

daily use to the people of God, though the manner of handling it be attended with many defects and weaknesses: every one cannot be excellent, who yet may be useful.

I will exercise your patience no longer than whilst I tell you,

1. Why I publish it to the view of the world.
2. Why I direct it particularly to you.

First, For the publication of it, take this sincere and brief account, That as I was led to this subject by a special providence, so to the publication of it by a kind of necessity. The providence at first leading me to it, was this, a dear and choice friend of my intimate acquaintance being under much inward trouble, upon the account of some special heart-disorder, opened the case to me, and earnestly requested some rules and helps in that particular; whilst I was bending my thoughts to that special case, divers other cases of like importance (some of which were dependent upon that consideration) occurred to my thoughts, and this scripture, which I have insisted upon, presented itself, as a fit foundation for the whole discourse; which being lengthened out to what you see, divers friends requested me to transcribe for their use, divers of the cases here handled, and some others begged me to publish the whole, to which I was in a manner necessitated, to save the pains of subscribing, which to me is a very tedious, and tiresome work: and just as I had almost finished the copy, an opportunity (and that somewhat strangely) offered to make it public. So that from first to last, I have been carried beyond my first intentions in this thing.

Objection. If any say, The world is even cloyed with books, and therefore though the discourse be necessary, yet the publication is needless.

Solution. 1. I answer, There are multitudes of books indeed, and of them many concern not themselves about root-truths, and practical godliness, but spend their strength upon impractical notions, and



frivolous controversies; many also strike at root-truths, and endeavour to undermine the power of godliness; and some there are that nourish the root, and tend to clear and confirm, to prepare and apply the great truths of the gospel, that they may be bread for souls to live and feed on: Now, though I could wish that those who had handled the pen of the scribe, had better employed their time and pains, than to obtrude such useless discourses upon the world; yet for books of the latter rank, I say, that when husbandmen complain of too much corn, let Christians complain of too many such books.

2. And if you be so highly conceited of your own furniture and ability, that such books are needless to you; if you let them alone, they will do you no hurt, and other poor hungry souls will be glad of them, and bless God for what you despise and leave.

Objection. If it be said that several of the cases here handled touch not your condition, I answer,

Solution 1. That which is not your condition may be another's condition. If you be placed in an easy, full and prosperous state, and so have no need of the helps here offered to support your hearts under pinching wants, others are forced to live by faith for every day's provision: If you be dandled upon the knee of providence, some of your brethren are under its feet: If you have inward peace and tranquillity of spirit, and so need not the counsels here given, to ward off those desperate conclusions that poor afflicted souls are ready to draw upon themselves at such a time; yet it may be a word in season to them, and they may say as David to Abigail, "Blessed be thou of the Lord, and blessed be thy advice."

2. That may be your condition shortly, which is not your condition at present: say not thy mountain stands strong, thou shalt never be moved: there are changes in the right-hand of the Most High; and then those truths which are little more esteemed than hedge-fruits, will be as apples of gold in pictures of silver. In Jer. 33:10, 11 the prophet there teaches the Jews (who then dwelt in their own houses)

how to defend their religion in Babylon, and what they should say to the Chaldeans there, and therefore that verse is written in Chaldee. So much for the reasons of its publication. Next, for the dedication of it to you, I was induced thereto by the consideration,

1. Of the relation I have to you above all the people in the world: I look upon my gifts as yours, my time as yours, and all the talents I am entrusted with, as yours: it is not with you as with a woman whose husband is dead, and so is freed from the law of her husband, the relation still continues, and so do all the mutual duties of it.

2. By the consideration of my necessitated absence from you, I would not that personal absence should by insensible degrees untwist (as it usually doth) the cord of friendship; and therefore I have endeavoured (as absent friends use to do) to preserve and strengthen it by this small remembrance. It was Vespasian's answer to Apollonius, when he desired access for two philosophers, 'My doors (said Vespasian, are always open to philosophers, but my very breast is open to thee.' I cannot say with him, my doors are open for the free access of friends, being by a sad providence shut against myself; but this I can say, my very breast is still open to you; you are as dear to me as ever.

3. Another inducement (and indeed the main) was the perpetual usefulness and necessity of these truths for you, which you will have continual need of: And I know few of you have such happy memories to retain, and I cannot be always with you to inculcate these things, but *litera scripta manet*. I was willing to leave this with you as a legacy, as a testimony of sincere love for, and care over you: this may counsel and direct you when I cannot: I may be rendered useless to you by a civil or natural death; but this will out-live me, and O that it may serve your souls when I am silent in the dust.

To hasten now to a conclusion, I have only these three requests to you, which I earnestly beseech you not to deny me; yea, I charge you,

as ever you hope to appear with comfort before the great Shepherd, do not dare to slight these requests.

1. Above all other studies in the world, study your own hearts: waste not a minute more of your precious time about frivolous and sapless controversies. It is reported even of Bellarmine (how truly I examine not) \**Quod a studiis scholasticæ theologiæ averteretur fere nauscabundus, quoniam succo carebant liquidæ pietatis*, i.e. he turned with loathing from the study of school-divinity, because it wanted the sweet juice of piety; I had rather it should be said of you, as one said of† Swinkfeldius, "He wanted a regular head, but not an honest heart," than that you should have regular heads, and irregular hearts. My dear flock, I have, according to the grace given me, laboured in the course of my ministry among you, to feed you with the heart-strengthening bread of practical doctrine; and I do assure you, it is far better you should have the sweet and saving impressions of gospel-truths feelingly and powerfully conveyed to your hearts, than only to understand them by a bare ratiocination, or dry syllogistical inference. Leave trifling studies to such as have time lying on their hands, and know not how to employ it: remember you are at the door of eternity, and have other work to do; those hours you spend upon heart-work in your closets, are the golden spots of all your time, and will have the sweetest influence upon your last hour. Never forget these sermons I preached to you upon that subject, from 2 Kings 20:2, 3. Heart-work is weighty, and difficult work; an error there may cost you your souls: I may say of it as Augustine speaks of the doctrine of the Trinity, *Nihilo facilius aut periculosius erratur*; A man can err in nothing more easily or more dangerously. O then study your hearts.

2. My next request is, That you will carefully look to your conversations, and be accurate in all your ways, hold forth the word of life: be sure by the strictness and holiness of your lives, to settle yourselves in the very consciences of your enemies. Remember that your lives must be produced in the great day to judge the world, 1 Cor. 6:2. O then, what manner of persons ought you to be! you have

many eyes over you; the omniscient eye of God that searches heart and reins, Rev. 2:23. the vigilant eye of Satan, Job 1:7, 8. the envious eyes of enemies, that curiously observe you, Psal. 5:8. the quick and observant eye of conscience, which none of your actions escape, Rom. 9:1.

O then be precise and accurate in all manner of conversation; keep up the power of godliness in your closets and families, and then you will not let it fall in your more public employments and converses in the world: I have often told you, that it is the honour of the gospel, that it makes the best parents and children, the best masters and servants, the best husbands and wives in the world.

My third and last request is, that you may pray for me: I hope I can say, and I am sure some of you have acknowledged, that I came at first among you, as the return and answer of your prayers: and indeed so it should be, see Luke 10:2. I am persuaded also, I have been carried on in my work by your prayers; it is sweet when it is so; see Eph. 6:18, 19. And I hope by your prayers to receive yet a farther benefit, even that which is mentioned, Heb. 13:18, 19. Philem. ver. 22. And truly it is but equal you should pray for me, I have often prayed for you: let the pulpit, family, and closet witness for me; and God forbid I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you.

Yea, friends, your own interest may persuade to it: what mercies you obtain for me, redound to your own advantage; if God preserve me, it is for your use and sendee: the more gifts and graces a minister hath, the better for them that shall wait on his ministry; the more God gives in to me, the more I shall be able to give out to you. I will detain you no longer, but to entreat you to accept this small testification of my great love, and have recourse to it, according as the exigencies of your condition shall require: read it consideringly, and obediently; judge it not by the dress and style, but by the weight and savour of what you read. It is a good rule of Bernard, *In legendis libris, non quæramus scientiam sed saporem*, i.e. In reading-books, regard not so much the science as the savour. That it may prove the savour of

life unto life to you, and all those in whose hands it shall come, is the hearty desire of

Your loving and faithful Pastor,

JOHN FLAVEL.

From my study at Ley, in

Slapton, Oct. 7, 1667.

## **Proverbs 4:23, The Text Explained**

Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.

THE heart of man is his worst part before it be regenerate, and the best afterwards: it is the seat of principles, and the fountain of actions. The eye of God is, and the eye of the Christian ought to be, principally fixed upon it.

The greatest difficulty in conversion is to win the heart to God; and the greatest difficulty after conversion is to keep the heart with God. Here lies the very pinch and stress of religion; here is that which makes the way to life a narrow way, and the gate to heaven a strait gate. Direction and help in this great work are the scope and sum of this text: wherein we have,

1. An exhortation, "Keep thy heart with all diligence."
2. The reason, or motive enforcing it, "For out of it are the issues of life."

In the exhortation I shall consider,

1. The matter of the duty.

## 2. The manner of performing it.

1. The matter of the duty, keep thy heart. Heart is not here taken properly for that noble part of the body which philosophers call the *primum vivens, et ultimum moriens*; the first that lives, and the last that dies; but by heart, in a metaphor, the scripture sometimes understands some particular noble faculty of thy soul: in Rom. 1:21 it is put for the understanding part, their foolish heart, i.e. "their foolish understanding was darkened." And Psalm 119:11 it is put for the memory, "Thy word have I hid in my heart;" and 1 John 3:20 it is put for the conscience, which hath in it both the light of the understanding and the recognitions of the memory: if our heart condemn us, i.e. if your consciences, whose proper office it is to condemn. But here we are to take it more generally for the whole soul, or inner man; for look what the heart is to the body, that the soul is to the man; and what health is to the heart, that holiness is to the soul: *Quod sanitas in corpore, id sanctitas in corde*. The state of the whole body depends upon the soundness and vigour of the heart, and the everlasting state of the whole man upon the good or ill condition of the soul.

And by keeping the heart, understand the diligent and constant use and improvement of all holy means and duties, to preserve the soul from sin, and maintain its sweet and free communion with God. \*Livater, on the place, will have the word taken from a besieged garrison, begirt by many enemies without, and in danger of being betrayed by treacherous citizens within, in which danger the soldiers, upon pain of death, are commanded to watch; and whereas the expression (keep thine heart) seems to put it upon us as our work, yet it doth not imply a sufficiency or ability in us to do it; we are as able to stop the sun in its course, or make the rivers run backward, as by our own skill and power to rule and order our hearts: we may as well be our own saviours, as our own keepers; and yet Solomon speaks properly enough, when he saith keep thy heart; because the duty is our's though the power be God's. A natural man hath no power, a gracious man hath some, though not sufficient; and that

power he hath, depends upon the exciting and assisting strength of Christ; *Gratia gratiam postulat*, grace within us is beholden to grace without us, John 15:5. "Without me ye can do nothing." So much of the matter of the duty.

2. The manner of performing it is, with all diligence; the Hebrew is very emphatical, † *Cum omni custodia*, keeping with all keeping, q. d. keep, keep; set double guards, your hearts will be gone else. And this vehemency of expression, with which the duty is urged, plainly implies how difficult it is to keep your hearts, and how dangerous to let them go.

3. The reason, or motive quickening to this duty, is very forcible and weighty: "For out of it are the issues of life." That is, it is the source and fountain of all vital actions and operations; *Hinc fons boni et peccandi origo*, saith Jerom; it is the spring and original both of good and evil, as the spring in a watch that sets all the wheels in motion. The heart is the treasury, the hand and tongue but the shops; what is in these comes from thence; the hand and tongue always begin where the heart ends. The heart contrives, and the members execute; Luke 6:45. "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth evil things; for out of the abundance of his heart his mouth speaketh." So then, if the heart err in its work, these must needs miscarry in theirs; for heart-errors are like the errors of the first concoction, which cannot be rectified afterwards: Or like the misplacing, and inverting of the stamps and letters in the press, which must needs cause so many errata in all the copies that are printed off. O then, how important a duty is that which is contained in the following proposition?

Doct. That the keeping and right managing of the heart in every condition, is the great business of a Christian's life.

What the philosopher saith of waters, is as properly applicable to hearts; *Suis terminis difficile continentur*, it is hard to keep them

within bounds: God hath set bounds and limits to them, yet how frequently do they transgress, not only the bounds of grace and religion, but even of reason and common honesty? Hic labor, hoc opus est; this is that which affords the Christian matter of labour, fear and trembling to his dying-day. It is not the cleansing of the hand that makes the Christian, for many a hypocrite can shew as fair a hand as he; but the purifying, watching, and right ordering of the heart; this is the thing that provokes so many sad complaints, and costs so many deep groans and brinish tears. It was the pride of Hezekiah's heart that made him lie in the dust mourning before the Lord, 2 Chron. 32:26. It was the fear of hypocrisy invading the heart, that made David cry, "Let my heart be found in thy statutes that I be not ashamed," Psalm 119:80. It was the sad experience he had of the divisions and distractions of his own heart, in the service of God, that made him pour out that prayer, Psalm 86:11. "Unite my heart to fear thy name."

The method in which I shall improve the point, shall be this,

First, I shall enquire what the keeping of the heart supposes and imports.

Secondly, Assign divers reasons, why Christians must make this the great work and business of their lives.

Thirdly, Point at those special seasons which especially call for this diligence in keeping the heart.

Fourthly, and lastly, Apply the whole in several uses.

1. What the keeping of the heart supposes and imports.

To keep the heart, necessarily supposes a previous work of sanctification, which hath set the heart right, by giving it a new spiritual bent and inclination; for as long as the heart is not set right by grace, as to its habitual frame, no duties or means can keep it right with God. Self is the poise of the unsanctified heart, which



biasses and moves it in all its designs and actions; and as long as it is so, it is impossible that any external means should keep it with God.

Man, by creation, was of one constant, uniform frame and tenour of spirit, held one straight and even course; not one thought or faculty revelled or disordered; his mind had a perfect illumination to understand and know the will of God, his will a perfect compliance therewith; his sensitive appetite, and other inferior powers, stood in a most obedient subordination.

Man, by degeneration, is become a most disordered and rebellious creature, contesting with, and opposing his Maker, as the first cause, by self-dependence; as the chiefest good, by self-love; as the highest Lord, by self-will, and as the last end, by self-seeking; and so is quite disordered, and all his acts irregular: His illuminated understanding is clouded with ignorance, his complying will full of rebellion and stubbornness; his subordinate powers, casting off the dominion and government of the superior faculties.

But by regeneration this disordered soul is set aright again: sanctification being the rectifying and due framing, or as the scripture phrases it, the renovation of the soul after the image of God, Eph. 4:24 in which self-dependence is removed by faith; self-love by the love of God; self-will by subjection and obedience to the will of God; and self-seeking by self-denial. The darkened understanding is again illuminated, Eph. 1:18 the refractory will sweetly subdued, Psalm 110:3 the rebellious appetite, or concupiscence gradually conquered, Rom. 5:7 per tot. And thus the soul which sin had universally depraved is again by grace restored and rectified.

This being pre-supposed, it will not be difficult to apprehend what it is to keep the heart, which is nothing else but the constant care and diligence of such a renewed man, to preserve his soul in that holy frame to which grace hath reduced it, and daily strives to hold it.

For though grace hath, in a great measure, rectified the soul, and given it an habitual and heavenly temper: yet sin often actually discomposes it again: so that even a gracious heart is like a musical instrument, which, though be it never so exactly tuned, a small matter brings it out of tune again; yea, hang it aside but a little, and it will need setting again before you can play another lesson on it; even so stands the case with gracious hearts; if they are in frame in one duty, yet how dull, dead, and disordered when they come to another? And therefore every duty needs a particular preparation of the heart, Job 11:13. "If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands towards him." Well then, to keep the heart is carefully to preserve it from sin, which disorders it; and maintain that spiritual and gracious frame, which fits it for a life of communion with God. And this includes these six acts in it:

1. Frequent observation of the frame of the heart, turning in and examining how the case stands with it, this is one part of the work. Carnal and formal persons take no heed to this, they cannot be brought to confer with their own hearts; there are some men and women that have lived forty or fifty years in the world, and have scarce had one hour's discourse with their own hearts all that while: It is a hard thing to bring a man and himself together upon such an account; but saints know those soliloquies and self-conferences to be of excellent use and advantage. The heathen could say, *anima sedendo et quiescendo fit sapiens*, the soul is made wise by sitting still in quietness: though bankrupts wish not to look into their books of accompt, yet upright hearts will know whether they go backward or forward, Psal. 77:6. "I commune with mine own heart." The heart can never be kept until its case be examined and understood.

2. It includes deep humiliation for heart-evils and disorders; thus Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, 2 Chron. 32:26. Thus the people were ordered to spread forth their hands to God in prayer, in a sense of the plague of their own hearts, 1 Kings 8:38. Upon this account many an upright heart hath been laid low before God: O what an heart have I? They have in their confessions pointed

at the heart, the pained place; Lord, here is the wound, here is the plague-sore. It is with the heart well kept, as it is with the eye, which is a fit emblem of it, if a small dust get into the eye, it will never leave twinkling and watering till it have wept it out: So the upright heart cannot be at rest till it have wept out its troubles, and poured out its complaints before the Lord.

3. It includes earnest supplications and instant prayer for heart purifying and rectifying grace, when sin hath defiled and disordered it; so Psalm 19:12. "Cleanse thou me from secret faults;" and Psalm 86:11. "Unite my heart to fear thy name." Saints have always many such petitions depending before the throne of God's grace; this is the thing which is most pleaded by them with God: When they are praying for outward mercies, haply their spirits may be more remiss, but when it comes to the heart-case, then they extend their spirits to the utmost, fill their mouths with arguments, weep and make supplication: Oh, for a better heart! Oh for a heart to love God more. To hate sin more, to walk more evenly with God: Lord, deny not to me such a heart, whatever thou deny me; give me an heart to fear thee, love and delight in thee, if I beg my bread in desolate places. It is observed of holy Mr. Bradford, that when he was confessing sin, he would never give over confessing until he had felt some brokenness of heart for that sin; and when praying for any spiritual mercy, would never give over that suit, until he had got some relish of that mercy. That is the third thing included in keeping the heart.

4. It includes the imposing of strong engagements and bonds upon ourselves to walk more accurately with God, and avoid the occasions whereby the heart may be induced to sin: Well-composed, advised, and deliberate vows, are, in some cases, of excellent use to guard the heart against some special sin; so Job 31:1. "I made a covenant with mine eyes;" by this means, holy ones have over-awed their souls, and preserved themselves from defilement by some special heart-corruptions.

5. It includes a constant holy jealousy over our own hearts; quicksighted self-jealousy is an excellent preservative from sin; he that will keep his heart must have the eyes of his soul awake and open upon all the disorderly and tumultuous stirrings of his affections; if the affections break loose, and the passions be stirred, the soul must discover and suppress them before they get to an height: O my soul, dost thou well in this? My tumultuous thoughts and passions, where is your commission?

*State viri, quæ causa vice? quive estis in armis. Vir.*

Happy is the man that thus feareth always, Prov. 28:14. By this fear of the Lord it is that men depart from evil, shake off security, and preserve themselves from iniquity; he that will keep his heart, must feed with fear, rejoice with fear, and pass the whole time of his sojourning here in fear, and all little enough to keep the heart from sin.

6. And, lastly, To add no more, it includes the realizing of God's presence with us, and setting the Lord always before us: This the people of God have found a singular mean to keep their hearts upright, and awe them from sin; when the eye of our faith is fixed upon the eye of God's omniscience, we dare not let out our thoughts and affections to vanity: Holy Job durst not suffer his heart to yield to an impure, vain thought; and what was it that moved him to so great a circumspection? Why, he tells you, Job 31:4. "Doth he not see my ways, and count all my steps? Walk before me (saith God to Abraham) and be thou perfect," Gen. 17:1. Even as parents use to set their children in the congregation before them, knowing that else they will be toying and playing; so would the heart of the best man too, were it not for the eye of God.

In these and such like particulars, do gracious souls express the care they have of their hearts; they are as careful to prevent the breaking loose of their corruptions in times of temptation, as seamen are to bind fast the guns, that they break not loose in a storm; as careful to

preserve the sweetness and comfort they have got from God in any duty, as one that comes out of an hot bath, or great sweat, is of taking cold, by going forth into the chill air. This is the work, and of all works in religion it is the most difficult, constant, and important work.

1. It is the hardest work; heart-work is hard work indeed. To shuffle over religious duties with a loose and heedless spirit, will cost no great pains; but to set thyself before the Lord, and tie up thy loose and vain thoughts to a constant and serious attendance upon him: this will cost thee something: To attain a facility and dexterity of language in prayer, and put thy meaning into apt and decent expressions, is easy; but to get thy heart broken for sin whilst thou art confessing it; melted with free grace whilst thou art blessing God for it; to be really ashamed and humbled through the apprehensions of God's infinite holiness, and to keep thy heart in this frame, not only in, but after duty, will surely cost thee some groans and travailing pain of soul: To repress the outward acts of sin, and compose the external part of thy life in a laudable and comely manner, is no great matter; even carnal persons by the force of common principles can do this; but to kill the root of corruption within, to set and keep up an holy government over thy thoughts, to have all things lie straight and orderly in the heart, this is not easy.

2. It is a constant work. The keeping of the heart is such a work as is never done till life be done: this labour and our life end together: It is with a Christian in this business, as it is with seamen that have sprung a leak at sea, if they tug not constantly at the pump, the water increases upon them, and will quickly sink them. It is in vain for them to say the work is hard, and we are weary; there is no time or condition in the life of a Christian, which will suffer an intermission of this work. It is in the keeping watch over our hearts, as it was in the keeping up of Moses' hand, whilst Israel and Amalek were fighting below, Exod. 17:12. No sooner do Moses' hands grow heavy and sink down, but Amalek prevails. You know it cost David and

Peter many a sad day and night for intermitting the watch over their own hearts but a few minutes.

3. It is the most important business of a Christian's life. Without this we are but formalists in religion; all our professions, gifts, and duties signify nothing: "My son, give me thine heart," Prov. 23:26. God is pleased to call that a gift, which is indeed a debt; he will put this honour upon the creature to receive it from him in the way of a gift; but if this be not given him, he regards not whatever else you bring to him: There is so much only of worth and value in what we do, as there is of heart in it. Concerning the heart, God seems to say, as Joseph of Benjamin, "If you bring not Benjamin with you, you shall not see my face." Among the heathens, when the beast was cut up for sacrifice, the first thing the priest looked upon was the heart, and if that was unsound and naught, the sacrifice was rejected. God rejects all duties (how glorious soever in other respects) offered him without a heart. He that performs duty without a heart, viz. heedlessly, is no more accepted with God than he that performs it with a double heart, viz. hypocritically, Isa. 66:3. And thus I have briefly opened the nature of the duty, what is imported in this phrase, "Keep thy heart."

2. Next I shall give you some rational account why Christians should make this the great business of their lives to keep their hearts.

The importance and necessity of making this our great and main business, will manifestly appear in that, 1. The honour of God; 2. The sincerity of our profession; 3. The beauty of our conversation; 4. The comfort of our souls; 5. The improvement of our graces; and, 6. Our stability in the hour of temptation; all are wrapt up in, and dependent on our sincerity and care in the management of this work.

1. The glory of God is much concerned therein; heart-evils are very provoking evils to the Lord. The schools do well observe, that outward sins are majoris infamæ, sins of great infamy; but heart-sins are majoris reatus, sins of deeper guilt. How severely hath the great God declared his wrath from heaven against heart-wickedness; the

great crime for which the old world stands indicted, Gen. 6:5, 6, 7. is heart-wickedness, "God saw that every imagination (or fiction) of their heart was only evil, and that continually;" for which he sent the dreadfulest judgment that was ever executed since the world began: "And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, and the creeping things and the fowls of heaven, for it repenteth me that I have made man," ver. 7. We find not their murders, adulteries, blasphemies, (though they were defiled with these) particularly alleged against them; but the evils of their hearts: Yea, that which God was so provoked by, as to give up his peculiar inheritance into the enemy's hand, was the evil of their hearts, Jer. 4:14. "O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved; how long shall vain thoughts lodge within thee?" The wickedness and vanity of their thoughts God took special notice of; and because of this the Chaldean must come upon them as a lion from his thicket, ver. 7. and tear them to pieces. For the very sin of thoughts it was that God threw down the fallen angels from heaven, and keeps them still in everlasting chains to the judgment of the great day; by which expression is not obscurely intimated some extraordinary judgment to which they are reserved, as prisoners that have most irons laid upon them, may be supposed to be the greatest malefactors: and what was their sin? Why, only spiritual wickedness! For they, having no bodily organs, could act nothing externally against God. Yea, mere heart-evils are so provoking, that for them he rejects with indignation all the duties that some men perform unto him, Isa. 66:3. "He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, is as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol." In what words could the abhorrence of a creature's actions be more fully expressed by the holy God? Murder and idolatry are not more vile in his account, than their sacrifices, though materially such as himself appointed: And what made them so? The following words inform us, "their soul delighteth in their abominations."

To conclude, such is the vileness of mere heart-sins, that the scriptures sometimes intimate the difficulty of pardon for them. So in the case of Simon Magus, Acts 8:21. his heart was not right, he had vile thoughts of God, and the things of God; the apostle bids him "repent and pray, if perhaps the thoughts of his heart might be forgiven him." O then, never slight heart-evils; for by these God is highly wronged and provoked; and for this reason let every Christian make it his work to keep his heart with all diligence.

2. The sincerity of our profession much depends upon the care and conscience we have in keeping our hearts; for it is most certain, that a man is but an hypocrite in his profession, how curious soever he be in the externals of religion, that is heedless and careless of the frame of his heart: You have a pregnant instance of this in the case of Jehu, 2 Kings 10:31. "But Jehu took no heed to walk in the ways of the Lord God of Israel with his heart." That context gives us an account count of the great service performed by Jehu against the house of Ahab and Baal, as also of a great temporal reward given him by God for that service, even that his children to the fourth generation, should sit upon the throne of Israel. And yet, in these words, Jehu is censured for an hypocrite; though God approved and rewarded the work, yet he abhorred and rejected the person that did it as hypocritical: And wherein lay his hypocrisy? but in this, that he took no heed to walk in the ways of the Lord with his heart, i.e. he did all insincerely, and for self-ends; and though the work he did was materially good, yet he, not purging his heart from those unworthy self-designs in doing it, was an hypocrite: And Simon, of whom we spake before, though he appeared such a person, that the apostle could not regularly refuse him; yet his hypocrisy was quickly discovered: And what discovered it but this, that though he professed and associated himself with the saints, yet he was a stranger to the mortification of heart sins? "Thy heart is not right with God," Acts 8:21. It is true there is a great difference among Christians themselves, in their diligence and dexterity about heart-work; some are more conversant and successful in it than others are; but he that takes no heed to his heart, that is not careful to order it aright before God, is but a hypocrite,



Ezek. 33:31, 32. "And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and sit before thee (as my people) and they hear thy words, but they will not do them; for with their mouths they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness." Here were a company of formal hypocrites, as is evident by that expression (as my people) like them but not of them. And what made them so? Their outside was fair; here were reverend postures, high professions, much seeming joy and delight in ordinances, "Thou art to them as a lovely song:" yea, but for all that they kept not their hearts with God in those duties, their hearts were commanded by their lusts, they went after their covetousness: had they kept their hearts with God, all had been well; but not regarding which way their hearts went in duty, there lay the score of their hypocrisy.

Objection. If any upright soul should hence infer, that I am an hypocrite too, for many times my heart departs from God in duty; do what I can, yet I cannot hold it close with God.

Solution. To this I answer, The very objection carries in it its own solution. Thou sayest, do what I can, yet I cannot keep my heart with God. Soul, if thou dost what thou canst, thou hast the blessing of an upright, though God sees good to exercise thee under the affliction of a discomposed heart. There remains still some wildness in the thoughts and fancies of the best to humble them; but if you find a care before to prevent them, and opposition against them when they come, grief and sorrow afterwards; you will find enough to clear you from reigning hypocrisy.

(1.) This fore-care is seen partly in laying up the word in thine heart to prevent them, Psal. 119:11. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee:" partly in our endeavours to engage our hearts to God, Jer. 30:21. and partly in begging preventing grace from God in our onsets upon duty, Psal. 119:36, 37. it is a good sign where this care goes before a duty.

And, (2.) It is a sweet sign of uprightness to oppose them in their first rise, Psal. 119:113. "I hate vain thoughts," Gal. 5:17. "The spirit lusteth against the flesh."

And, (3.) Thy after-grief discovers thy upright heart. If, with Hezekiah, thou art humbled for the evils of thy heart, thou hast no reason, from those disorders, to question the integrity of it; but to suffer sin to lodge quietly in the heart, to let thy heart habitually and uncontrolledly wander from God, is a sad and dangerous symptom indeed.

3. The beauty of our conversation arises from the heavenly frame and holy order of our spirits; there is a spiritual lustre and beauty in the conversation of saints: "The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour," they shine as the lights of the world; but whatever lustre and beauty is in their lives, comes from the excellency of their spirits; as the candle within puts a lustre upon the Ian thorn in which it shines. It is impossible that a disordered and neglected heart should ever produce well-ordered conversation; and since (as the text observes) the issues or streams of life flow out of the heart as their fountain, it must needs follow, that such as the heart is, the life will be: hence 1 Pet. 2:11, 12. "Abstain from fleshly lusts,—having your conversation honest,"\* or beautiful, as the Greek word imports. So Isa. 55:7. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts." His way notes the course of his life, his thoughts the frame of his heart; and therefore since the way and course of his life flows from his thoughts, or the frame of his heart, both or neither will be forsaken: the heart is the womb of all actions, these actions are virtually and seminally contained in our thoughts, these thoughts being once made up into affections, are quickly made up into suitable actions and practices. If the heart be wicked, then, as Christ saith, Mat. 15:19. "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries," &c. Mark the order; first, wanton, or revengeful thoughts, then unclean or murderous practices.

And if the heart be holy and spiritual, then, as David speaks, from sweet experience, Psal. 45:1. "My heart is (inditing) a good matter, I speak of things which (I have made), my tongue is as the pen of a ready writer." Here is a life richly beautified with good works, some ready made; "I will speak of the things which I have made;" others upon the wheel making, my heart is inditing, but both proceeding from the heavenly frame of his heart.

Put but the heart in frame, and the life will quickly discover that it is so. I think it is not very difficult to discern, by the duties and converses of Christians, what frames their spirits are under; take a Christian in a good frame, and how serious, heavenly, and profitable, will his converses and duties be! what a lovely companion is he during the continuance of it! It would do any one's heart good to be with him at such a time, Psal. 37:30, 31. "The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment, the law of his God is in his heart."

When the heart is up with God, and full of God, how dexterously and ingeniously will he wind in spiritual discourse, improving every occasion and advantage to some heavenly purpose? Few words run then at the waste spout.

And what else can be the reason why the discourses and duties of many Christians, are become so frothy and unprofitable, their communion both with God, and one another, becomes as a dry stalk, but because their hearts are neglected? Surely this must be the reason of it, and verily it is an evil greatly to be bewailed; for want of this Christian-fellowship, it is become a sapless thing; so the attracting beauty that was wont to shine from the conversations of the saints upon the faces and consciences of the world, (which, if it did not allure, and bring them in love with the ways of God, yet at the least left a testimony in their consciences of the excellency of those men and their ways) this is in a great measure lost, to the unspeakable detriment of religion.

Time was, when Christians did carry it at such a rate, that the world stood at a gaze at them, as the word  $\xi\epsilon\nu\iota\zeta\omicron\nu\tau\alpha\iota$ , 1 Pet. 4:4. imports. Their life and language were of a different strain from others, their tongues discovered them to be Galileans, wherever they came; but now, since vain speculations and fruitless controversies have so much obtained, and heart-work, practical godliness, so much neglected among professors, the case is sadly altered; their discourse is become like other men's: if they come among you now, they may (to allude to that, Acts 2:6) "hear every man speak in his own language." And truly I have little hope to see this evil redressed, and the credit of religion again repaired, till Christians fall to their old work; till they ply heart-work closer; when the salt of heavenly-mindedness is cast into the spring, the streams will run clearer, and sweeter.

4. The comfort of our souls doth much depend upon the keeping of our hearts; for he that is negligent in attending his own heart, is (ordinarily) a great stranger to assurance, and the sweet comforts flowing from it.

Indeed, if the Antinomian doctrine were true, which teaches you to reject all marks and signs for the trial of your conditions, telling you it is only the Spirit that immediately assures you, by witnessing your adoption directly without them, then you might be careless of your hearts, yea, strangers to them, and yet no strangers to comfort: but since both scripture and experience do confute this dotage, I hope you will never look for comfort in that unscriptural way. I deny not but it is the work and office of the Spirit, to assure you, and yet do confidently affirm, that if ever you attain assurance, in the ordinary way wherein God dispenses it, you must take pains with your own hearts; you may expect your comforts upon easier terms, but I am mistaken if ever you enjoy them upon any other; "Give all diligence, prove yourselves;" this is the scripture way. I remember Mr. Roberts, in his Treatise of the covenant, tells us, that he knew a Christian, who in the infancy of his Christianity, so vehemently panted after the infallible assurance of God's love, that for a long time together he

earnestly desired some voice from heaven, yea, sometimes walking in the solitary fields, earnestly desired some miraculous voice from the trees and stones there; this, after many desires and longings, was denied him; but in time a better was afforded in the ordinary way of searching the word, and his own heart. An instance of the like nature the learned Gerson gives us of one that was driven by temptation upon the very borders of desperation; at last being sweetly settled, and assured, one asked him how he attained it? He answered, *Non ex nova aliqua revelatione, &c.* Not by any extraordinary revelation, but by subjecting his understanding to the scriptures, and comparing his own heart with them. The Spirit, indeed, assures by witnessing our adoption; and he witnesseth two ways.

(1.) Objectively, i.e. by working those graces in our souls which are the conditions of the promise, and so the Spirit and his graces in us, are all one: the Spirit of God dwelling in us, is a mark of our adoption. Now the Spirit cannot be discerned in his essence, but in his operations; and to discern these, is to discern the Spirit; and how these should be discerned, without serious searching, and diligent watching of the heart, I cannot imagine.

(2.) The other way of the Spirit's witnessing is effectively, i.e. by irradiating the soul with a grace-discovering light, shining upon his own work; and this in order of nature follows the former work; he first infuses the grace, and then opens the eye of the soul to see it. Now since the heart is the subject of that infused grace, even this way of the Spirit's witnessing also includes the necessity of keeping carefully our own hearts: For,

(1.) A neglected heart is so confused and dark, that the little grace which is in it, is not ordinarily discernible: the most accurate and laborious Christians, that take most pains, and spend most time about their hearts, do yet find it very difficult to discover the pure and genuine workings of the Spirit there: how then shall the Christian who is (comparatively) negligent and remiss about heart-work, be ever able to discover it? Sincerity, which is the *quæsitum*,

the thing sought for, lies in the heart like a small piece of gold in the bottom of a river, he that will find it, must stay till the water is clear, and settled, and then he shall see it sparkling at the bottom. And that the heart may be clear, and settled, how much pains and watching, care and diligence, will it cost?

(2.) God doth not usually indulge lazy and negligent souls with the comforts of assurance; he will not so much as seem to patronize sloth and carelessness; he will give it, but it shall be in his own way: his command hath united our care and comfort together; they are mistaken that think the beautiful child of assurance may be born without pangs: ah, how many solitary hours have the people of God spent in heart-examination! how many times have they looked into the word, and then into their hearts? Sometimes they thought they discovered sincerity, and were even ready to draw forth the triumphant conclusion of assurance; then comes a doubt they cannot resolve, and dashes all again; many hopes and fears, doubtings and reasonings, they have had in their own breasts, before they arrived at a comfortable settlement.

To conclude, suppose it possible for a careless Christian to attain assurance, yet it is impossible he should long retain it: For, as for those whose hearts are filled with the joys of assurance, if extraordinary care be not used, it is a thousand to one if ever they long enjoy it: for a little pride, vanity, carelessness, will dash to pieces all that for which they have been labouring a long time, in many a weary duty. Since, then, the joy of our life, the comfort of our souls, rises and falls with our diligence in this work, keep your hearts with all diligence.

5. The improvement of our graces depends upon the keeping our hearts; I never knew grace thrive in a negligent and careless soul: the habits and roots of grace are planted in the heart; and the deeper they are radicated there, the more thriving and flourishing grace is. In Eph. 3:17 we read of "being rooted in grace;" grace in the heart is the root of every gracious word in the mouth, and of every holy work

in the hand, Psal. 116:10. 2 Cor. 4:13. It is true, Christ is the root of a Christian; but Christ is origo originans, the originating root; and grace origo originata, a root originated, planted, and influenced by Christ; according as this thrives under divine influences, so the acts of grace are more or less fruitful, or vigorous. Now in a heart not kept with care and diligence, these fructifying influences are stopt and cut off, multitudes of vanities break in upon it, and devour its strength; the heart is, as it were the pasture, in which multitudes of thoughts are fed every day; a gracious heart diligently kept, feeds many precious thoughts of God in a day, Psal. 139:17. "How precious are thy thoughts to me, O God! how great is the sum of them? If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand; and when I awake, I am still with thee." And as the gracious heart feeds and nourishes them, so they refresh and feast the heart, Psal. 63:5, 6. "My soul is filled as with marrow and fatness whilst I think upon thee," &c. But in the disregarded heart, swarms of vain and foolish thoughts are perpetually working, and jostle out those spiritual ideas, and thoughts of God, by which the soul should be refreshed.

Besides, the careless heart makes nothing out of any duty or ordinance it performs or attends on, and yet these are the conduits of heaven, from whence grace is watered and made fruitful: a man may go with an heedless spirit from ordinance to ordinance, abide all his days under the choicest teaching, and yet never be improved by them; for heart-neglect is a leak in the bottom, no heavenly influences, how rich soever, abide in that soul, Mat. 13:3, 4. The heart that lies open and common, like the high-way, free for all passengers; when the seed fell on it, the fowls came and devoured it. Alas! it is not enough to hear, unless we take heed how we hear; a man may pray, and never be the better, unless he watch unto prayer. In a word, all ordinances, means, and duties, are blessed unto the improvement of grace, according to the care and strictness we use in keeping our hearts in them.

6. Lastly, The stability of our souls in the hour of temptation, will be much according to the care and conscience we have of keeping our

hearts; the careless heart is an easy prey to Satan in the hour of temptation, his main batteries are raised against that fort royal, the heart; if he wins that, he wins all; for it commands the whole man: and, alas! how easy a conquest is a neglected heart? It is no more difficult to surprize it, than for an enemy to enter that city whose gates are open and unguarded: it is the watchful heart that discovers and suppresses the temptation before it comes to its strength. Divines observe this to be the method in which temptations are ripened and brought to their full strength.

There is, (1.) Ορεξις, The irritation of the object, or that power it hath to work upon, and provoke our corrupt nature; which is either done by the real presence of the object, or else by speculation, when the object (though absent) is held out by the phantasy before the soul.

(2.) Then follows Ορμη, the motion of the sensitive appetite, which is stirred and provoked by the phantasy, representing it as a sensual good, as having profit or pleasure in it.

(3.) Then there is Βουλησις, a consultation in the mind about it, deliberating about the likeliest means of accomplishing it.

(4.) Next follows Αιρησις, the election, or choice of the will.

(5.) And lastly Βουλημα, The desire, or full engagement of the will to it; all this may be done in a few moments, for the debates of the soul are quick, and soon ended: when it comes thus far, then the heart is won, Satan hath entered victoriously, and displayed his colours upon the walls of that royal fort; but had the heart been well guarded at first, it had never come to this height: the temptation had been stopped in the first or second act. And indeed there it is stopped easily: for it is the motions of a tempted soul to sin, as in the motion of a stone falling from the brow of a hill; it is easily stopped at first, but when it is set agoing, *Vires acquirit eundo*: And therefore it is the greatest wisdom in the world to observe the first motions of the heart, to check and stop sin there. The motions of sin are weakest at



first, a little care and watchfulness may prevent much mischief now, which the careless heart not heeding, is brought within the power of temptation; as the Syrians were brought blindfold into the midst of Samaria, before they knew where they were.

By this time, reader, I hope thou art fully satisfied how consequential and necessary a work the keeping of the heart is, it being a duty that wraps up so many dear interests of the soul in it.

3. Next, according to the method propounded, I proceed to point out those special seasons in the life of a Christian, which require and call for our utmost diligence in keeping the heart: for though (as we observed before) the duty binds ad semper, and there is no time or condition of life in which we may be excused from this work; yet there are some signal seasons, critical hours, requiring more than a common vigilance over the heart.

And the first,

## **Seasons**

### **Keeping the Heart in the Time of Prosperity**

1. Season. 'Is the time of prosperity, when providence smiles upon us, and dandles us upon its knee. Now, Christian, keep thy heart with all diligence; for now it will be exceeding apt to grow secure, proud, and earthly, *Rara virtus est humilitas honorata*, (saith Bernard) to see a man humble under prosperity, is one of the greatest rarities in the world. Even a good Hezekiah could not hide a vain-glorious temper under his temptation, and hence that caution to Israel, Deut. 6:10, 11, 12. "And it shall be when the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware to thy fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities which thou buildest not,

and houses full of all good things which thou filledst not, &c. Then beware lest thou forget the Lord:" and indeed so it fell out, "for Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked," Deut. 32:15.'

Now then, the first case will be this, viz.

Case 1. How a Christian may keep his heart from pride and carnal security, under the smiles of providence, and constancy of creature-comforts.

There are seven choice helps to secure the heart from the dangerous snares of prosperity; the first is this,

1. To consider the dangerous ensnaring temptations attending a pleasant and prosperous condition; few, yea, very few of those that live in the pleasures and prosperity of this world, escape everlasting perdition, Mat. 19:24. "It is easier (saith Christ) for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven;" and 1 Cor. 1:26. "Not many mighty, not many noble are called." It might justly make us tremble when the scripture tells us in general, that few shall be saved; much more when it tells us, that of that rank and sort of which we are speaking, but few shall be saved. When Joshua called all the tribes of Israel to lot upon them for the discovery of Achan, doubtless Achan feared; when the tribe of Judah was taken, his fear increased; but when the family of the Zarhites was taken, it was time then to tremble. So when the scripture comes so near as to tell us that of such a sort of men very few shall escape, it is time to look about; *Miror si potest servari aliquis rectorum*, saith Chrysostom; I should wonder if any of the rulers be saved. O how many have been coached to hell in the chariots of earthly pleasures, while others have been whipped to heaven by the rod of affliction! how few, like the daughter of Tyre, come to Christ with a gift! how few among the rich in treat his favour!

2. It may keep us yet more humble and watchful in prosperity, if we consider that among Christians many have been much the worse for it. How good had it been for some of them, if they had never known prosperity! When they were in a low condition, how humble, spiritual, and heavenly, were they! but when advanced, what an apparent alteration hath been upon their spirits? It was so with Israel, when they were in a low condition in the wilderness; then Israel was holiness to the Lord, Jer. 2:23 but when they came into Canaan, and were fed in a fat pasture, then, "we are lords, we will come no more unto thee," ver. 31. Outward gains are ordinarily attended with inward losses; as in a low condition their civil employments were wont to have a tang and savour of their duties, so in an exalted condition their duties commonly have a tang of the world. He indeed is rich in grace, whose graces are not hindered by his riches; there are but few Jehoshaphats in the world, of whom it is said, 2 Chron 17:5, 6. "He had silver and gold in abundance, and his heart was lifted up in the way of God's commands:" Will not this keep thy heart humble in prosperity, to think how dear many godly men have paid for their riches, that through them they have lost that which all the world cannot purchase? Then, in the next place,

3. Keep down thy vain heart by this consideration, that God values no man a jot the more for these things. God values no man by outward excellencies, but by inward graces: they are the internal ornaments of the Spirit, which are of great price in God's eyes, 1 Pet. 3:4. He despises all worldly glory, and accepts no man's person; "but in every nation, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him," Acts 10:35. Indeed, if the judgment of God went by the same rule that man's doth, we might value ourselves by these things, and stand upon them: But as one said (when dying) I shall not appear before God as a doctor, but as a man; tantus quisque est, quantus est apud Deum. So much every man is, and no more, as he is in the judgment of God. Doth thy heart yet swell? And will neither of the former considerations keep it humble?

4. Then, fourthly, Consider, how bitterly many persons have bewailed their folly when they came to die, that ever they set their hearts upon these things, and heartily wished that they had never known them. What a sad story was that of Pius Quintus, who dying cried out despairingly, when I was in a low condition, I had some hopes of salvation; but when I was advanced to be cardinal, I greatly doubted it; but since I came to the Popedom, I have no hope at all. Mr. Spencer also tells us a real, but sad story, of a rich oppressor, who had scraped up a great estate for his only son; when he came to die, he called his son to him, and said, son; do you indeed love me? The son answered, that nature, besides his paternal indulgence, obliged him to that. Then said the father, express it by this; hold thy finger in the candle as long as I am saying a pater noster: The son attempted, but could not endure it. Upon that the father broke out into these expressions, thou canst not suffer the burning of thy finger for me, but to get this wealth, I have hazarded my soul for thee, and must burn body and soul in hell for thy sake: Thy pain would have been but for a moment, but mine will be unquenchable fire.

5. The heart may be kept humble, by considering of what a clogging nature earthly things are to a sold heartily engaged in the way to heaven; they shut out much of heaven from us at present, though they may not shut us out of heaven at last. If thou consider thyself under the notion of a stranger in this world, travelling for heaven, and seeking a better country, thou hast then as much reason to be taken, and delighted with these things, as a weary horse hath with a heavy clog-bag: There was a serious truth in that atheistical scoff of Julian when he took away the Christians' estates, and told them it was to make them fitter for the kingdom of heaven.

6. Is thy spirit, for all this, flatulent and lofty? Then urge upon it the consideration of that awful day of reckoning, wherein, according to our receipts of mercies, shall be our accompts for them: And methinks this should awe and humble the vainest heart that ever was in the breast of a saint. Know for certain, that the Lord records all the mercies that ever he gave thee, from the beginning to the end of thy

life. Mic. 6:5. "Remember, O my people, from Shittim unto Gilgal," &c. yea, they are exactly numbered, and recorded in order to an account; and thy account will be suitable. Luke 12:48. "To whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required." You are but stewards, and your Lord will come to take an account of you; and what a great account have you to make, who have much of this world in your hand? What swift witnesses will your mercies be against you, if this be the best fruits of them?

7. It is a very humbling consideration, that the mercies of God should work otherwise upon my spirit, than they use to do upon the spirits of others to whom they come as sanctified mercies from the love of God. Ah Lord what a sad consideration is this! enough to lay me in the dust; when I consider,

(1.) That their mercies have greatly humbled them; the higher God has raised them, the lower they have laid themselves before God. Thus did Jacob, when God had given him much substance. Gen. 22:10. "And Jacob said, I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands." And thus it was with holy David, 2 Sam. 7:18. When God had confirmed the promise to him, to build him a house, and not reject him as he did Saul, he goes in before the Lord, and saith, "Who am I? and what is my father's house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?" And so indeed God required, Deut. 26:5 when Israel was to bring to God the first-fruits of Canaan, they were to say, "A Syrian ready to perish was my father," &c. Do others raise God the higher for the raising them? And the more God raises me, the more shall I abuse him, and exalt myself? O what a sad thing is this!

(2.) Others have freely ascribed the glory of all their enjoyments to God, and magnified not themselves, but him, for their mercies: So David, 2 Sam. 7:26. "Let thy name be magnified, and the house of thy servant be established." He doth not fly upon the mercy, and suck out the sweetness of it, looking no farther than his own comfort; no,

he cares for no mercy except God be magnified in it. So Psalm 18:2 when God had delivered him from all his enemies, "The Lord (saith he) is my strength, and my rock, he is become my salvation." They did not put the crown upon their own heads, as I do.

(3.) The mercies of God have been melting mercies unto others, melting their souls in love to the God of their mercies. So Hannah, 1 Sam. 2:1 when she received the mercy of a son, "My soul (saith she) rejoiceth in the Lord;" not in the mercy, but in the God of the mercy. And so Mary, Luke 1:46. "My soul doth magnify the Lord, my spirit rejoiceth in God my Saviour." The word signifies to make more room for God; their hearts were not contracted, but the more enlarged to God.

(4.) The mercies of God have been mighty restraints to keep others from sin. So Ezra 9:13. "Seeing thou, our God, hast given us such a deliverance as this, should we again break thy commandments?" Ingenuous souls have felt the force of the obligations of love and mercy upon them.

(5.) To conclude, The mercies of God to others have been as oil to the wheels of their obedience, and made them fitter for services, 2 Chron. 17:5. Now if mercies work contrarily upon my heart, what cause have I to be afraid that they come not to me in love? I tell you, this is enough to damp the spirit of any saint, to see what sweet effects they have had on others, and what sad effects on him.

## **Keeping the Heart in the Time of Adversity**

2. Season, "The second special season in the life of a christian requiring more than a common diligence to keep his heart, is the time of adversity; When providence frowns upon you, and blasts your outward comforts, then look to your hearts, keep them with all diligence from repining against God, or fainting under his hand; for

troubles though sanctified, are troubles still; even sweet-brier, and holy thistles, have their prickles. Jonah was a good man, and yet how pettish was his heart under affliction? Job was the mirror of patience, yet how was his heart discomposed by trouble? You will find it as hard to get a composed spirit under great afflictions, as it is to fix quick-silver. O the hurries and tumults which they occasion even in the best hearts! Well, then, the second case will be this:'

Case 2. How a Christian under great afflictions may keep his heart from repining, or desponding under the hand of God? Now there are nine special helps. I shall here offer, to keep thy heart in this condition; and the first shall be this, to work upon your hearts this great truth,

### **Helps**

1. That by these cross providences, God is faithfully pursuing the great design of electing love upon the souls of his people, and orders all these afflictions as means sanctified to that end.

Afflictions fall not out by casualty, but by counsel, Job 5:6. Eph. 1:11 by this counsel of God they are ordained as means of much spiritual good to saints, Isa. 27:9. "By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged," &c. Heb. 12:10. "But he for our profit," &c. Rom. 8:28. "All things work together for good." They are God's workmen upon our hearts, to pull down the pride and carnal security of them; and being so, their nature is changed; they are turned into blessings and benefits, Psalm. 119:71. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." And sure, then, thou hast no reason to quarrel with, but rather to admire that God should concern himself so much in thy good, to use any means for the accomplishing of it. Philip. 3:11. "Paul could bless God, if by any means he might attain the resurrection of the dead. My brethren, (saith James) count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations," Jam. 1:2, 3. My father is about a design of love upon my soul, and do I well to be angry with him? All that he doth is in pursuance of, and in reference to some eternal, glorious ends upon

my soul. O it is my ignorance of God's design, that makes me quarrel with him! he saith to thee in this case, as to Peter, "What I do thou knowest not now, but hereafter thou shalt know it."

Help 2. Though God hath reserved to himself a liberty of afflicting his people, yet he hath tied up his own hands by promise never to take away his loving-kindness from them. Can I look that scripture in the face with a repining, discontented spirit, 2 Sam. 7:14. "I shall be his father, and he will be my son; if he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: Nevertheless, my mercy shall not depart away from him." O my heart! my haughty heart! dost thou well to be discontented, when God hath given thee the whole tree, with all the clusters of comfort growing on it, because he suffers the wind to blow down a few leaves; Christians have two sorts of goods, the goods of the throne, and the goods of the footstool; moveables, and immoveables: If God have secured these, never let my heart be troubled at the loss of those; indeed, if he had cut off his love, or discovenanted my soul, I had reason to be cast down; but this he hath not, nor can he do it.

Help 3. It is of marvellous efficacy to keep the heart from sinking under affliction, to call to mind, that thine own father hath the ordering of them: Not a creature moves hand or tongue against thee, but by his permission. Suppose the cup be a bitter cup, yet it is the cup which thy father hath given thee to drink; and canst thou suspect poison to be in that cup which he delivers thee? Foolish man, put home the case to thine own heart, consult with thine own bowels; canst thou find in thy heart to give thy child that which would hurt, or undo him? No, thou wouldest as soon hurt thyself as him; "If thou then being evil knowest how to give good, gifts to thy children," how much more doth God? Matth. 7:11. The very consideration of his nature, a God of love, pity, and tender mercies, or of his relation to thee as a Father, Husband, Friend, might be security enough, if he had not spoken a word, to quiet thee in this case; and yet you have his word too, Jer. 25:6. I will do you no hurt. You lie too near his heart to hurt you; nothing grieves him more than your groundless



and unworthy suspicions of his designs do; would it not grieve a faithful, tender-hearted physician when he hath studied the case of his patient, prepared the most excellent receipts to save his life, to hear him cry out, O he hath undone me! he hath poisoned me; because it gripes and pains him in the operation? O when will you be ingenious!

Help 4. God respects you as much in a low, as in a high condition; and therefore it need not so much trouble you to be made low: nay, to speak home, he manifests, more of his love, grace, and tenderness, in the time of affliction, than prosperity. As God did not at first choose you because you were high, so he will not forsake you because you are low: Men may look shy upon you, and alter their respects, as your condition is altered. When providence hath blasted your estates, your summer friends may grow strange, as fearing you may be troublesome to them; but will God do so? No, no! "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," Heb. 13:5. Indeed if adversity and poverty could bar you from access to God, it were a sad condition; but you may go to God as freely as ever. "My God (saith the church) will hear me," Mic. 7:7. Poor David, when stripped of all earthly comforts, could yet encourage himself in the Lord his God; and why cannot you? Suppose your husband or child had lost all at sea, and should come to you in rags; could you deny the relation, or refuse to entertain him? If you would not, much less would God: Why then are ye so troubled? Though your condition be changed, your Father's love and respects are not changed.

Help 5. And what if by the loss of outward comforts, God will preserve your souls from the ruining power of temptation? Sure then, you have little cause to sink your hearts by such sad thoughts about them. Are not these earthly enjoyments the things that made men shrink and warp in times of trial? For the love of these many have forsaken Christ in such an hour, Matth. 19:22. "He went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." And if this be God's design, what have I done in quarrelling with him about it? We see mariners in a storm can throw over-board rich bales of silk, and precious

things, to preserve the vessel and their lives with it, and every one saith they act prudently; we know it is usual for soldiers in a city besieged, to batter down, or burn the fairest buildings without the walls, in which the enemy may shelter in the siege; and no man doubts but it is wisely done; Such as have gangrened legs or arms, can willingly stretch them out to be cut off, and not only thank, but pay the chirurgeon for his pains: And must God only be repined at, for casting over what will sink you in a storm? For pulling down that which would advantage your enemy in the siege of temptation? For cutting off what would endanger your everlasting life? O inconsiderate, ungrateful man! are not these things, for which thou grievest, the very things that have ruined thousands of souls? Well, what Christ doth in this, thou knowest not now, but hereafter thou mayest.

Help 6. It would much stay the heart under adversity, to consider That God, by such humbling providences, may be accomplishing that for which you have long prayed and waited: And should you be troubled at that? Say, Christian, hast thou not many prayers depending before God upon such accounts as these: that he would keep thee from sin, discover to thee the emptiness and insufficiency of the creature; that he would kill and mortify thy lusts, that thy heart may never find rest in any enjoyment but Christ? Why now, by such humbling and impoverishing strokes, God may be fulfilling thy desire: Wouldst thou be kept from sin? Lo, he hath hedged up thy way with thorns. Wouldst thou see the creature's vanity? Thy affliction is a fair glass to discover it; for the vanity of the creature is never so effectually and sensibly discovered, as in our own experience of it. Wouldst thou have thy corruptions mortified? This is the way; now God takes away the food and fuel that maintained them; for as prosperity begat and fed them, so adversity, when sanctified, is a mean to kill them. Wouldst thou have thy heart to rest no where but in the bosom of God? What better way canst thou imagine providence should take to accomplish thy desire, than by pulling from under thy head, that soft pillow of creature delights on which thou restedst before? And yet thou fret at this, peevish child!

how dost thou exercise thy Father's patience? If he delay to answer thy prayers, thou art ready to say he regards thee not; if he do that which really answers the scope and main end of them, but not in the way thou expectedst, thou quarrellest with him for that: as if instead of answering, he were crossing all thy hopes and aims; is this ingenuous? Is it not enough that God is so gracious to do what thou desirest, but thou must be so impudent to expect he should do it in the way which thou prescribest.

Help 7. Again, It may stay thy heart, if thou consider, That in these troubles, God is about that work, which if thou didst see the design of, thy soul would rejoice. We, poor creatures, are bemisted with much ignorance, and are not able to discern how particular providences work towards God's end; and therefore, like Israel in the wilderness, are often murmuring, because Providence leads us about in a howling desart, where we are exposed to straits; though yet, then he led them, and is now leading us, by the right way, to a city of habitations. If you could but see how God, in his secret counsel, hath exactly laid the whole plot and design of thy salvation, even to the smallest means and circumstances; this way, and by these means such a one shall be saved, and by no other; such a number of afflictions I appoint for this man, at this time, and in this order; they shall befall him thus, and thus they shall work for him: Could you, I say, but discern the admirable harmony of divine dispensations, their mutual relations to each other, together with the general respect and influence they all have unto the last end; of all the conditions in the world, you would chuse that you are now in, had you liberty to make your own choice. Providence is like a curious piece of arras, made up of a thousand shreds, which single we know not what to make of, but put together, and stitched up orderly, they represent a beautiful history to the eye. As God works all things according to the counsel of his own will, so that the counsel of God hath ordained this as the best way to bring about thy salvation; Such a one hath a proud heart, so many humbling providences I appointed for him: such a one an earthly heart, so many impoverishing

providences for him: Did you but see this, I need say no more to support the most dejected heart.

Help 8. Farther, It would much conduce to the settlement of your hearts, to consider, That by fretting and discontent, you do yourselves more injury than all the afflictions you lie under could do; your own discontent is that which arms your troubles with a sting; it is you that make your burden heavy, by struggling under it. Could you but lie quiet under the hand of God, your condition would be much easier and sweeter than it is; *Impatiens œgrotus crudelem facit medicum*. This makes God lay on more strokes, as a father will upon a stubborn child that receives not correction.

Besides, it unfits the soul to pray over its troubles, or take in the sense of that good which God intends by them: Affliction is a pill, which being wrapt up in patience and quiet submission, may be easily swallowed; but discontent chews the pill and so embitters the soul; God throws away some comfort which he saw would hurt you, and you will throw away your peace after it; he shoots an arrow which sticks in your clothes, and was never intended to hurt, but only to fright you from sin: and you will thrust it onward to the piercing of your very hearts by despondency and discontent.

Help 9. Lastly, If all this will not do, but thy heart, like Rachel, still refuses to be comforted, or quieted, then consider one thing more, which, if seriously pondered, will doubtless do the work; and that is this, Compare the condition thou art now in, and art so much dissatisfied with, with that condition others are, and thyself deservest to be in: Others are roaring in flames, howling; under the scourge of vengeance, and amongst them I deserve to be. O my soul! is this hell? Is my condition as bad as the damned? O what would thousands now in hell give to change conditions with me! It is a famous instance which\* Dr. Taylor gives us of the duke of Conde; 'I have read (saith he) that when the duke of Conde had entered voluntarily into the incommodities of a religious poverty, he was one day espied and pitied by a lord of Italy, who out of tenderness wished

him to be more careful and nutritive of his person. The good duke answered, Sir, be not troubled, and think not that I am ill provided of conveniences, for I send an harbinger before me, who makes ready my lodgings, and takes care that I be royally entertained. The lord asked him who was his harbinger? he answered, The knowledge of myself, and the consideration of what I deserve for my sins, which is eternal torments; and when with this knowledge I arrive at my lodging, how unprovided soever I find it, methinks it is ever better than I deserve.' Why doth the living man complain? And thus the heart may be kept from desponding, or repining under adversity.

## **Keeping the Heart in the Time of Zion's Troubles**

Season 3. 'The third season calling for more than ordinary diligence to keep the heart, is the time of Zion's troubles: When the church, like the ship in which Christ and his disciples were, is oppressed, and ready to perish in the waves of persecution; then good souls are ready to sink, and be shipwrecked too, upon the billows of their own fears. I confess most men rather need the spur than the reins in this case, and yet some sit down as over-weighed with the sense of the church's troubles. The loss of the ark cost old Eli his life; the sad posture Jerusalem lay in, made good Nehemiah's countenance change in the midst of all the pleasures and accommodations of the court, Neh. 2:2. Ah! this goes close to honest hearts.'

"But though God allow, yea, command the most awakened apprehensions of these calamities, and in "such a day to call to mourning, weeping, and girding with sackcloth," Isa. 22:12 and severely threaten the insensible, Amos 6:1 yet it will not please him to see you sit like pensive Elijah under the juniper-tree. 1 Kings 19:4. "Ah Lord God! it is enough, take away my life also." No, mourners in Zion you may, and ought to be; but self-tormentors you must not be; complain to God you may, but to complain of God, though but by an unsuitable carriage, and the language of your actions, you must not.'

Case 3. The third case that comes next to be spoken to is this; How public and tender hearts may be relieved and supported when they are overweighed with the burdensome sense of Zion's troubles? 'I grant, it is hard for him that preferreth Zion to his chief joy, to keep his heart that it sink not below the due sense of its troubles; and yet this ought, and may be done by the use of such heart-establishing directions as these.

## **Directions**

Direction 1. Settle this great truth in your hearts, that no trouble befalls Zion, but by the permission of Zion's God; and he permits nothing out of which he will not bring much good at last to his people.

There is truly a principle of quietness in the permitting, as in the commanding will of God. See it in David, 2 Sam. 16:10. "Let him alone, it maybe God hath bidden him:" And in Christ, John 19:11. "Thou couldst have no power against me, except it were given thee from above;" it should much calm our spirits that it is the will of God to suffer it; and had he not suffered it, it could never have been as it is.

This very consideration quieted Job, Eli, David, and Hezekiah; that the Lord did it was enough to them, and why should it not be so to us? If the Lord will have Zion plowed as a field, and her goodly stones lie in the dust; if it be his pleasure that Antichrist shall rage yet longer, and wear out the saints of the Most High; if it be his will that a day of trouble, and of treading down, and of perplexity, by the Lord God of hosts shall be upon the valley of vision, that the wicked shall devour the man that is more righteous than he, what are we that we should contest with God? Fit it is that we should be resigned up to that will whence we proceeded, and that he that made us should dispose of us as he pleaseth: he may do what seemeth him good without our consent: doth poor man stand upon equal ground, that he should capitulate with his Creator, or that God should render

him an account of any of his matters? It is every way as reasonable we be content, however God dispose of us, as that we be obedient to whatever he commands us.

But then, if we pursue this argument further by considering that God's permissions do all meet at last in the real good of his people, this will much more quiet our spirits. Do the enemies carry away the good figs, even the best among the people into captivity? This looks like a sad providence, but yet God sends them thither for their good, Jer. 24:5. Doth God take the Assyrian as a staff in his hand to beat his people with? Those blows are smart, and make them cry; but the end of his so doing is, "That he may accomplish his whole work upon mount Zion," Isa. 10:12. If God can bring much good out of the worst and greatest evil of sin, much more out of temporal afflictions; and it is as evident that he will, as that he can do so. For it is inconsistent with the wisdom of a common agent to permit any thing, which he might prevent if he pleased, to cross his great design and end: and can it be imagined that the most wise God should do so?

Well then, as Luther told Melancthon, Desinat Philippus esse rector mundi; so say I to you; Let infinite wisdom, power, and love alone; for by these all creatures are swayed, and actions guided, in reference to the church; it is none of our work to rule the world, but to submit to him that doth: Non cœco impetu volvuntur rotæ; the motions of providence are all judicious, the wheels are full of eyes; it is enough that the affairs of Zion are in a good hand.

Direction 2. Ponder this heart-supporting truth, in reference to Zion's trouble: That how many troubles soever are upon her, yet her King is in her.

What! hath the Lord forsaken his churches? Hath he sold them into the enemy's hand? doth he not regard what evils befalls them? that our hearts sink at this rate? Is it not too shameful an undervaluing of the great God, and too much magnifying of poor, impotent men, to fear and tremble at creatures, whilst God is in the midst of us? The

church's enemies are many and mighty; let that be granted, yet that argument with which Caleb and Joshua strove to raise their own hearts, is of as much force now as it was then: "The Lord is with us, fear them not," Num. 14:9. The historian tells us, that when Antigonus over-heard his soldiers reckoning how many their enemies were, and so discouraging one another; he suddenly steps in among them with this question, 'And how many (said he) do you reckon me for?' Discouraged souls, how many do you reckon the Lord for? Is he not an over match for all his enemies? Is not one Almighty more than many mighties? Doth his presence stand for nothing with us? "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Rom. 8:31. What think you, was the reason of that great exploration Gideon made in Judg. 6? He questions, ver. 12, 13. he desires a sign, ver. 17. and after that another, ver. 36. and what was the end of all this, but that he might be sure the Lord was with him, and that he might but write this motto upon his ensign? "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon." So then, if you can be well assured the Lord is with his people, you will get thereby above all your discouragements: and that he is so, you need not, with him, desire a sign from heaven; lo, you have a sign before you, even their marvellous preservation amidst all their enemies. If God be not with his people, how is it they are not swallowed up quick? Do their enemies want malice, power, or opportunity? No, but there is an invisible hand upon them. Well then, as it is Exod. 33:14. let his presence give us rest; and though the mountains be hurled into the sea, though heaven and earth mingle together, fear not, God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved.

Direction 3. Ponder the great advantages attending the people of God in an afflicted condition. If a low and an afflicted state in the world be really best for the church, then your dejections are not only irrational, but ungrateful; indeed, if you estimate the happiness of the church by its worldly ease, splendour, and prosperity, then such times will seem bad for it; but if you reckon its glory to consist in its humility, faith, patience, and heavenly-mindedness, no condition in the world abounds with advantages for these, as an afflicted condition doth. It was not persecutions and prisons, but worldliness



and wantonness, that was the poison of the church: neither was it the earthly glory of its professors, but the blood of its martyrs, that was the seed of the church. The power of godliness did never thrive better than in affliction, and never ran lower than in times of greatest prosperity: when "we are left a poor and an afflicted people, then we learn to trust in the name of the Lord," Zeph. 3:12. What say ye, sirs? Is it indeed for the saint's advantage to be weaned from the love of, and delight in ensnaring worldly vanities! To be quickened, and pricked forward with more haste to heaven, to have clearer discoveries of their own hearts, to be taught to pray more fervently, frequently, spiritually: to look and long for the rest to come, more ardently? If these be for their advantage, experience teaches us, that no condition is ordinarily blessed with such fruits as these, like an afflicted condition.

And is it well done, then, to repine and droop because your Father consults more the advantage of your souls, than the pleasing of your humours? Because he will bring you a nearer way to heaven than you are willing to go? Is this a due requital of his love, who is pleased so much to concern himself in your welfare? which is more than he will do for thousands in the world, upon whom he will not lay a rod, or spend an affliction for their good, Hos. 4:17. Mat. 15:14. But alas! we judge by sense, and reckon things good or evil, according to what we, for the present, can taste and feel in them.

Direction 4. Take heed that you overlook not the many precious mercies which the people of God enjoy amidst all their troubles.

It is a pity that our tears, upon the account of our troubles, should so blear and blind our eyes, that we should not see our mercies and grounds of comfort. I will not insist upon the mercy of having your lives given you for a prey, nor yet upon the many outward comforts, temporal conveniencies and accommodations, which you enjoy even above what Christ and his precious servants, of whom the world was not worthy, ever had.

But what say you to pardon of sin? interest in Christ? the covenant of promise? and an eternity of happiness, in the presence of God after a few days are over? O that ever a people entitled to such mercies as these, should droop under any temporal affliction, or be so much concerned for the frowns of men, and loss of trifles! you have not the smiles of great men, but you have the favour of the great God; you are, it may be, cast back in your estates, but thereby furthered in spirituals. You cannot live so bravely, plentifully, and easily, as before; but still you may live as holy and heavenly as ever: will you then grieve so much for these circumstantial, as to forget your substantial? Shall light troubles make you forget weighty mercies? Remember the church's true riches are laid out of the reach of all its enemies: they may make you poor, but not miserable. What though God do not distinguish, in his outward dispensations, betwixt his own and others? Yea, what though his judgments single out the best, and spare the worst? What though an Abel be killed in love, and a Cain survive in hatred; a bloody Dionysius die in his bed, and a good Josiah fall in battle? What though the belly of the wicked be filled with hidden treasures, and the teeth of the saints broken with gravestones; yet still here is much matter of praise; for electing love has distinguished, though common providence did not; and whilst prosperity and impunity slay the wicked, even slaying and adversity shall benefit and save the righteous.

Direction 5. Believe, that how low soever the church be plunged under the waters of adversity, it shall assuredly rise again. Fear not, for as sure as Christ arose the third day, notwithstanding the seal and watch that were upon him; so sure the church shall arise out of all her troubles, and lift up its victorious head over all its enemies: there is no fear of ruining that people who thrive by their losses, and multiply by being diminished. O be not too quick to bury the church before she is dead! stay till Christ hath tried his skill, before you give it up for lost. The bush may be all in a flame, but shall never be consumed, and that because of the good will of him that dwelleth in it.

Direct. 6. Record the famous instances of God's care and tenderness over his people in former straits. Christ hath not suffered it to be devoured yet; for above these 1700 years the Christian church hath lived in affliction, and yet it is not consumed; many a wave of persecution hath gone over it, and yet it is not drowned; many designs to ruin it, and hitherto none have prospered; this is not the first time that Hamans and Ahithophels have plotted its ruin; that an Herod hath stretched out his hand to vex it: still it hath been preserved from, supported under, or delivered out of all its troubles; and is it not as dear to God as ever? Is he not as able to save it now, as formerly? Though we know not whence deliverance should arise, "Yet the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations," 2 Pet. 2:9.

Direction 7. If you can fetch no comfort from any of the former arguments, then, in the last place, Try whether you cannot draw some comfort out of your very troubles. Surely this trouble of yours is a good argument of your integrity; union is the ground of sympathy; if you had not some rich adventure in that ship, you would not tremble as you do, when it is in danger: besides, this frame of spirit may afford you this argument, that if you be sensible of the church's troubles, Jesus Christ is much more sensible of, and solicitous about it, than you can be; and he will have an eye of favour upon them that mourn for it, Isa. 57:18.

## **Keeping the Heart in Time of Danger and Public Distraction**

Season 4. 'The fourth special season of expressing our utmost diligence in keeping our hearts, is the time of danger and public distraction; in such times the best hearts are but too apt to be surprized by slavish fear; it is not easy to secure the heart against distractions in times of common distraction. If Syria be confederate with Ephraim, how do the hearts of the house of David shake, even as the trees of the wood, which are shaken with the wind? Isa. 7:2.

When there are ominous signs in the heaven; on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and waves roaring, then the hearts of men fail for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth, Luke 21:25, 26. Even a Paul himself may "Sometimes complain of fightings within, when there are fears without," 2 Cor. 7:5.

But, my brethren, these things ought not to be so, saints should be of a more raised spirit: So was David, when his heart was kept in a good frame, Psal. 27:1. "The Lord is my light, and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?" Let none but the servants of sin be the slaves of fear, let them that have delighted in evil, fear evil; *impious tantum metuit, quantum nocuit*. O let not that which God hath threatened as a judgment upon the wicked, ever seize upon the breasts of the righteous. "I will send (saith God) faintness into their hearts in the land of their enemies, and the sound of a shaking leaf shall chase them," Lev. 26:36. O what poor-spirited men are these, to fly at a shaking leaf! which makes a pleasant, and not a terrible noise; and is in itself a kind of natural music: But to a guilty conscience the whistling leaves are drums and trumpets. "But God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of love, and of a sound mind," 2 Tim. 1:7. A sound mind as it stands there in opposition to the spirit of fear, is an unwounded conscience, not infirmed by guilt: And this should make a man as bold as a lion. I know it cannot be said of a saint what God spake of Leviathan, that he is made without fear: There is a natural fear in every man, and it is as impossible to be wholly put off as the body itself is: It is a perturbation of the mind, arising from the apprehension of approaching danger; and as long as dangers can approach us, we shall find some perturbations within us. It is not my purpose to commend to you a stoical apathy, nor yet to take you off from such a degree of cautional, preventive fear as may fit you for trouble, and be serviceable to your souls; there is a provident fear that opens our eyes to foresee danger, and quickens to a prudent and lawful use of means to prevent it: Such was Jacob's fear, Gen. 32:7, 9, 10, &c. But it is the fear of diffidence I persuade you to keep your

hearts from; that tyrannical passion which invades the heart in times of danger; distracts, weakens, and unfits the heart for duty; drives men upon unlawful means, and brings a snare with it. Well then, the fourth case will be this:

Case 4. How a Christian may keep his heart from distracting and tormenting fears, in times of great and threatening dangers.

Now there are fourteen excellent rules, or helps, for the keeping the heart from sinful fear, when imminent dangers threaten us: And the first is this,

## **Rules**

Rule 1. Look upon all the creatures as in the hand of God, who manages them in all their motions, limiting, restraining, and determining them all at his pleasure.

Get this truth well settled by faith in your hearts; it will marvellously guard them against slavish fears. The first chapter of Ezekiel contains an admirable scheme, or draught of providence; there you may see the living creatures who move the wheels, viz. the great affairs and turnings of things here below, coming unto Christ, who sits upon the throne, to receive new orders and instructions from him, ver. 24, 25, 26. And in Rev. 6 you read of white, black, and red horses, which are nothing else but the instruments which God employs in executing his judgments in the world, as wars, pestilence, and death: But when these horses are prancing, and trampling up and down the world, here is that may quiet our hearts, that God hath the reins in his hand. Wicked men are sometimes like mad horses, they would stamp the people of God under their feet, but that the bridle of providence is in their lips, Job 1:11, 12. A lion at liberty is terrible to meet, but who is afraid of the lion in the keeper's hand?

Rule 2. Remember that this God, in whose hand all the creatures are, is your Father, and is much more tender over you, than you are, or can be, over yourselves: "He that toucheth you, toucheth the "apple

of mine eye," Zech. 2:8. Let me ask the most timorous woman, whether there be not a vast difference between the sight of a drawn sword in the hand of a bloody ruffian, and the same sword in the hand of her own tender husband? As great a difference there is in looking upon creatures by an eye of sense, and looking on them as in the hand of your God by an eye of faith; that is a sweet scripture to this purpose, Isa. 54:5. "Thy maker is thy Husband, the Lord of Hosts is his name:" he is Lord of all the hosts of creatures in the world: Who would be afraid to pass through an army, though all the soldiers should turn their swords and guns towards him, if the general of that army were his friend, or father? I have met with an excellent story of a religious young man, who being at sea, with many other passengers in a great storm, and they being half dead with fear, he only was observed to be very cheerful, as if he had been but little concerned in that danger: One of them demanding the reason of his cheerfulness, 'O, (said he) it is because the pilot of the ship is my father.' Consider Christ, first as the King, and supreme Lord over the providential kingdom, and then as your Head, Husband, and Friend, and thou wilt quickly say, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul." This truth will make you cease trembling, and cause you to sing in the midst of dangers. Psal. 47:7. "The Lord is King of all the earth, sing ye praise with understanding;" "(or, as the Hebrew word is,) Every one that hath understanding," viz. of this heart-reviving and establishing doctrine of the dominion of our Father over all the creatures.

Rule 3. Urge upon your hearts the express prohibitions of Christ in this case: and let your hearts stand in awe of the violations of them.

He hath charged you not to fear, Luke 21:9. "When ye shall hear of wars and commotions, see that ye be not terrified." And Phil. 1:28. "In nothing be terrified by your adversaries." Yea, in Matth. 10:26, 28, 31 and within the compass of six verses, our Saviour commands us thrice, not to fear man. Doth every big word of proud dust and ashes make thee afraid? Doth the voice of a man make thee tremble? and shall not the voice of God: If thou art of such a fearful and

timorous spirit, how is it that thou fearest not to disobey the flat commands of Jesus Christ? Methinks the command of Christ should have as much power to calm, as the voice of a poor worm to terrify thy heart. Isa. 51:12, 13. "I, even I, am he that comforteth you: Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be made as the grass, and forgettest the Lord thy Maker?" We cannot fear creatures sinfully, till we have forgotten God; did we remember what he is, and what he hath said, we should not be of such feeble spirits: Bring thy heart, then, to this dilemma in times of danger; if I let into my heart the slavish fear of man, I must let out the reverential awe and fear of God; and dare I cast off the fear of the Almighty for the frowns of a man? Shall I lift up proud dust above the great God? Shall I run upon a certain sin, to shun a probable danger? O keep thy heart by this consideration!

Rule 4. Remember how much needless trouble your vain fears have brought upon you formerly, and how you have disquieted yourselves to no purpose.

Isa. 51:13. "And hast feared continually because of the oppressor, as if he were ready to devour; and where is the fury of the oppressor?" He seemed ready to devour, but yet you are not devoured: I have not brought upon you the thing that you feared; you have wasted your spirits, disordered your souls, and weakened your hands, and all this to no purpose: You might have all this while enjoyed your peace, and possessed your souls in patience. And here I cannot but observe a very deep policy of Satan, managing a design against the soul by these vain fears: I call them vain, in regard of the frustration of them by Providence; but certainly they are not in vain, as to the end Satan aims at in raising them; for herein he acts as soldiers use do in the siege of a garrison, who on purpose to wear out the besieged by constant watchings, and thereby unfit them to make resistance when they storm it in earnest, do every night give them false alarms, which though they come to nothing, yet doth notably serve this further design of the enemy. O when will you beware of Satan's devices?

Rule 5. Consider solemnly, That though the things you fear should really fall out, yet there is more evil in your own fear, than in the thing feared;

And that not only as the least evil of sin is worse than the greatest evil of suffering; but as this sinful fear hath really more torment and trouble in it, than is in that condition you are so much afraid of: fear is both a multiplying and a tormenting passion; it represents troubles much greater than they are, and so tortures and wrecks the soul much worse than when the suffering itself comes. So it was with Israel at the Red-sea, they cried out, and were sore afraid, till they put foot in the water, and then a passage was opened through those waters, which they thought would have drowned them. Thus it is with us; we look through the glass of carnal fear, upon the waters of trouble, the swellings of Jordan, cry out, O they are unfordable! we must needs perish in them: But when we come into the midst of those floods, indeed we find the promise made good; "God will make a way to escape," 1 Cor. 10:13. Thus it was with blessed Bilney, when he would make a trial, by putting his finger to the candle, and not able to endure that, he cried out, 'What, cannot I bear the burning of a finger? how then shall I be able to bear the burning of my whole body to-morrow?' And yet when that morrow came, he could go cheerfully into the flames, with that scripture in his mouth, Isa. 43:1, 2, 3. "Fear not, for I have redeemed thee: I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine; when thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt."

Rule 6. Consult the many precious promises which are written for your support and comfort in all dangers.

These are your refuges to which you may fly and be safe; "When the arrows of danger fly by night, and destruction wasteth at noon day." There are particular promises suited to particular cases and exigencies; and there are general promises, reaching all cases and conditions: Such are these, Rom. 8:28. "All things shall work



together for good," &c. And Eccles. 8:12. "Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet it shall be well with them that fear the Lord." &c. "Could you but believe the promises, your hearts should be established," 2 Chron. 20:29. Could you but plead them with God, as Jacob did. Gen. 32:12. "Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good," &c. they would relieve you in every distress.

Objection. But that promise was made personally, and by name to him, so are not these to me.

Answer. If Jacob's God be your God, you have as good an interest in them as he had. The church, a thousand years after that transaction betwixt God and Jacob, applied that which God spake to him, as if it had been spoken to themselves, Hos. 12:4. He "found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us."

Rule 7. Quiet your trembling hearts by recording and consulting your past experiences of the care and faithfulness of God in former distresses.

These experiences are food for your faith in a wilderness condition, Psal. 74:14. By this David kept his heart in time of danger, 1 Sam. 17:37 and Paul his, 2 Cor. 1:10. It was sweetly answered by Silentiarius, when one told him that his enemies way-laid him to take away his life, *Si Deus mei curam non habit, quid vivo?* If God take no care of me, how have I escaped hitherto? you may plead with God old experiences to procure new ones; for it is in pleading with God for new deliverances, as it is in pleading for new pardons. Now mark how Moses pleads on that account with God, Numb. 14:19. "Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people, as thou hast forgiven them from Egypt until now." He doth not say as men do, Lord, this is the first fault, thou hast not been troubled before to sign their pardon: But, Lord, because thou hast pardoned them so often, I beseech thee pardon them once again. So in new straits, Lord, thou hast often heard, helped, and saved in former fears; therefore now help again,

for with thee there is plenteous redemption, and thine arm is not shortened.

Rule 8. Be well satisfied that you are in the way of your duty, and that will beget holy courage in times of danger.

"Who will harm you, if you be followers of that which is good?" 1 Pet. 3:13. Or, if any dare attempt it, "you may boldly commit yourselves to God in well-doing," 1 Pet. 4:19. It was this consideration that raised Luther's spirit above all fear: 'In the cause of God (said he) I ever am, and ever shall be stout;' herein I assume this title, *Cedo nulli*, a good cause will bear up a man's spirit bravely. Hear the saying of a\* heathen, to the shame of cowardly Christians: 'When the emperor Vespasian had commanded Fluidius Priscus not to come to the senate; or if he did, to speak nothing but what he would have him; the senator returned this noble answer, That as he was a senator, it was fit he should be at the senate; and if being there he were required to give his advice, he would speak freely that which his conscience commanded him; the emperor threatening then that he should die, he answered, Did I ever tell you that I was immortal? Do you what you will, and I will do what I ought; it is in your power to put me to death unjustly, and in me to die constantly.'

Righteousness is a breast-plate, the cause of God will pay all your expences; let them tremble whom danger finds out of the way of duty.

Rule 9. Get your consciences sprinkled with the blood of Christ from all guilt, and that will set your hearts above all fear.

It is guilt upon the conscience that softens and cowardizes our spirits: "The righteous are bold as a lion," Prov. 28:1. It was guilt in Cain's conscience that made him cry, "Every one that meets me shall slay me," Gen. 4:14. A guilty conscience is more terrified with conceited dangers, than a pure conscience is with real ones. A guilty sinner carries a witness against himself in his own bosom. It was

guilty Herod cried out, "John Baptist is risen from the dead." Such a conscience is the devil's anvil, on which he fabricates all those swords and spears, with which the guilty sinner pierces and wounds himself; guilt is to danger what fire is to gun-powder; a man need not fear to walk among many barrels of powder if he have no fire about him.

Rule 10. Exercise holy trust in times of great distress.

Make it your business to trust God with your lives and comforts, and then your hearts will be at rest about them. So did David, Psal. 57:3. "At what time I am afraid, I will trust in thee;" q. d. Lord, if at any time a storm rise, I will make bold to shelter me from it under the covert of thy wings. Go to God by acts of faith and trust, and never doubt but he will secure you, Isa. 62:3. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee." God takes it well when thou comest to him thus; "Father, my life, my liberty, or estate, are hunted after, and I cannot secure them; O let me leave them in thy hand: The poor leaveth himself with thee;" and doth his God fail him? No, "thou art the helper of the fatherless," Psal. 10:14 that is, thou art the helper of the destitute one, that hath none to go to but God. And that is a sweet scripture, Psal. 112:7. "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord;" he doth not say, his ear shall be privileged from the report of evil tidings, he may hear as sad tidings as other men, but his heart shall be privileged from the terror of those tidings, "his heart is fixed."

Rule 11. Consult the honour of religion more, and your personal safety less.

Is it for the honour of religion, think you, that Christians should be as timorous as hares, to start at every sound? Will not this tempt the world to think, that whatever you talk, yet your principles are no better than other men's? O what mischief may the discoveries of your fears before them do! It was a noble saying of Nehemiah, chap. 6:11. "Should such a man as I flee? And who, being as I am, would flee?"

Were it not better you should die, than that the world should be prejudiced against Christ by your example? For, alas! how apt is the world, who judge more by what they see in your practices, than by what they understand of your principles, to conclude from your timorousness, that how much soever you commend faith, and talk of assurance, yet you dare trust to those things no more than they when it comes to the trial. O let not your fears lay such a stumbling-block before the blind world.

Rule 12. He that will secure his heart from fear, must first secure the eternal interest of his soul in the hands of Jesus Christ.

When this is done, then you may say, Now world do thy worst. You will not be very solicitous about a vile body, when you are once assured it shall be well to all eternity with your precious souls. "Fear not them (saith Christ) that can kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do." The assured Christian may smile with contempt upon all his enemies, and say, Is this the worst that you do? What say you, Christians? Are you assured that your souls are safe, that within a few moments of your dissolution they shall be received by Christ into an everlasting habitation? Well, if you be sure of that, never trouble yourselves about the instruments and means of your dissolution.

Objection. O, but a violent death is terrible to nature!

Answer. But what matter is it, when thy soul is in heaven, whether it were let out at thy mouth, or at thy throat? Whether thy familiar friends, or barbarous enemies, stand about thy dead body, and close thine eyes? Alas! it is not worth the making so much to do about; *Nihil corpus sentit in nervo cum anima sit in cœlo*, thy soul shall not be sensible in heaven how thy body is used on earth; no, it shall be swallowed up in life.

Rule 13. Learn to quench all slavish creature-fears, in the reverential fear of God.

This is a cure by diversion: It is a rare piece of Christian wisdom to turn those passions of the soul which most predominate into spiritual channels; to turn natural anger into spiritual zeal, natural mirth into holy cheerfulness, and natural fear into an holy dread and awe of God. This method of cure Christ prescribes in that forementioned place, Mat. 10 like to that which is in Isa. 8:12, 13 fear not their fear; but how shall we help it? Why, "sanctify the Lord of hosts himself, and let him be your fear and your dread." Natural fear may be allayed for the present by natural reason, or the removal of the occasion, but then it is but like a candle blown out with a puff of breath, which is easily blown in again; but if the fear of God extinguish it, then it is like a candle quenched in water, which cannot easily be rekindled.

Rule 14. Lastly, Pour out those fears to God in prayer, which the devil and your own unbelief pour in upon you in times of danger.

Prayer is the best out-let to fear; where is the Christian that cannot set his probatum est to this direction? I will give you the greatest example in the world to encourage you in the use of it, even the example of Jesus Christ, Mark 14:32. When the hour of his danger and death drew nigh, he gets into the garden, separates from the disciples, and there wrestles mightily with God in prayer, even unto an agony: in reference to which the apostle saith, Heb. 5:7. "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong cries and tears, to him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared." He was heard as to strength and support to carry him through it, though not as to deliverance, or exemption from it.

Now, O that these things might abide with you, and be reduced to practice in these evil days, that many trembling souls may be established by them.

# Keeping the Heart in the Time of Outward Want

Season 5. 'The fifth season to excite this diligence in keeping the heart, is a time of straits and outward pinching wants; although at such times we should complain to God, and not of God, (the throne of grace being erected for a time of need, Heb. 4:16) yet when the waters of relief run low, and want begins to pinch hard, how prone are the best hearts to distrust the fountain! when the meal in the barrel, and the oil in the cruse are almost spent, our faith and patience are almost spent too. Now it is difficult to keep down the proud and unbelieving heart in an holy quietude and sweet submission at the foot of God: It is an easy thing to talk of trusting God for daily bread, while we have a full barn or purse: but to say as the prophet, Hab. 3:17. "Though the fig-tree should not blossom, neither fruit be in the vine, &c. yet will I rejoice in the Lord:" surely this is not easy.' The fifth case therefore shall be this:

Case 5. How a Christian may keep his heart from distrusting God; or repining against him, when outward wants are either felt or feared.

This case deserves to be seriously pondered, and especially to be studied now, since it seems to be the design of providence to empty the people of God of their creature-fulness, and acquaint them with those straits which hitherto they have been altogether strangers to.

Now, to secure the heart from the fore-mentioned dangers attending this condition, these following considerations, through the blessing of the Spirit, may prove effectual. And the first is this;

## Considerations

Consideration 1. That if God reduce you to straits and necessities, yet he deals no otherwise therein with you, than he hath done with some of the choicest and holiest men that ever lived.

Your condition is not singular; though you have hitherto been strangers to wants, other saints have daily conversed, and been familiarly acquainted with them. Hear what blessed Paul speaks, not of himself only, but in the name of other saints reduced to like exigencies, 1 Cor. 4:11. "Even to this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked and buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place." To see such a man as Paul going up and down the world with a naked back, and empty belly, and not a house to put his head in, one that was so far above thee in grace and holiness, one that did more service for God in a day, than perhaps thou hast done in all thy days, and yet you repine as if hardly dealt with! Have you forgot what necessities and straits even a David hath suffered? How great was his straits and necessities? 1 Sam. 25:8. "Give, I pray thee (saith he to Nabal) whatsoever cometh to thy hand, to thy servants, and to thy son David." Renowned Musculus was forced to dig in the town ditch for a maintenance. Famous Ainsworth (as I have been credibly informed) was forced to sell the bed he lay on to buy bread. But what speak I of these? Behold a greater than any of them, even the Son of God, "who is the heir of all things, and by whom the worlds were made;" yet sometimes would have been glad of any thing, having nothing to eat, Mark 11:12, 13. "And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry; and seeing a fig-tree afar off, having leaves, he came if haply he might find [any thing] thereon."

Well then, hereby God hath set no mark of hatred upon you, neither can you infer the want of love from the want of bread. When thy repining heart puts the question, Was there ever any sorrow like unto mine? Ask these worthies, and they will tell thee, though they did not complain and fret as thou dost, yet they were driven to as great straits as thou art.

Consid. 2. If God leave you not in this necessitous condition without a promise, you have no reason to repine or despond under it.

This is a sad condition indeed to which no promise belongs. I remember Mr. Calvin, upon these words, Isa. 9:1. "Nevertheless the

dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation," &c. solves the doubt, in what sense the darkness of the captivity was not so great as the lesser incursions made by Tiglath Pileser. In the captivity the city was destroyed, and the temple burnt with fire, there was no comparison in the affliction; but yet the darkness should not be such, and the reason (saith he) is this, *Huic certain promissionem esse additam, cum in prioribus nulla csset; i.e. there was a certain promise made to this, but none to the other.*

It is better to be as low as hell with a promise, than in paradise without one. Even the darkness of hell itself would be comparatively no darkness at all, were there but a promise to enlighten it. Now God hath left many sweet promises for the faith of his poor people to feed on in this condition: such are these: Psal. 34:9, 10. "O fear the Lord, ye his saints, for there is no want to them that fear him; the lions do lack and suffer hunger, but they that fear the Lord shall want nothing that is good." Ps. 33:18, 19. "The eye of the Lord is upon the righteous, to keep them alive in famine." Ps. 84:11. "No good thing will he with-hold from them that walk uprightly." Rom. 8:32. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Isa. 41:17. "When the poor and the needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them." Here you see, first, their extreme wants, water being put even for the necessaries of life. (2.) Their certain relief, I the Lord will hear them; in which it is supposed that they cry unto him in their straits, and he hears their cry.

Having therefore these promises, why should not your distrustful hearts conclude like David's, Psal. 23:1. "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want."

Objection. But these promises imply conditions: if they were absolute, they would afford more satisfaction.



Solution. What are those tacit conditions you speak of but these: (1.) That either he will supply or sanctify your wants: (2.) That you shall have so much as God sees fit for you. And doth this trouble you? Would you have the mercy whether sanctified or no? Whether God sees it fit for you or no? Methinks the appetites of saints after earthly things should not be so ravenous, to seize greedily upon any enjoyment, not caring how they have it.

But oh, when wants pinch, and we see not whence supplies should come, then your faith in the promise shakes, and we, like murmuring Israel cry, "He gave bread, can he give water also?" O unbelieving hearts! When did his promise fail? Whoever trusted them, and was ashamed? May not God upbraid thee with thine unreasonable infidelity; as Jer. 2:31. "Have I been a wilderness unto you?" &c. Or as Christ said to the disciples, "Since I was with you, lacked ye any thing?" Yea, may you not upbraid yourselves, may you not say with good old Polycarp, These many years I have served Christ, and found him a good master. Indeed he may deny what your wantonness, but not what your real wants call for. He will not regard the cry of your lusts, nor yet despise the cry of your faith; though he will not indulge and humour your wanton appetites, yet he will not violate his own faithful promises. These promises are your best security for eternal life; and it is strange if they should not satisfy you for daily bread: remember ye the words of the Lord, and solace your hearts with them amidst all your wants. It is said of Epicurus, that in the dreadful fits of the cholic, he often refreshed himself, *Ob memoriam inventorum*,—by calling to mind his inventions in philosophy: and of Possidonius the philosopher, that in a great fit of the stone he solaced himself with discourses of moral duty; and when the pain twinged him, he would say, *Nihil agis, dolor; quamvis sis molestus, nunquam confitebor te esse malum*:—O pain, thou dost nothing: though thou art a little troublesome, I will never confess thee to be evil. If upon such grounds as these they could support themselves under such grinding and racking pains, and even delude their diseases by them, how much rather should the precious promises of God, and the sweet experiences which have gone along step by step

with them, make you to forget all your wants, and comfort you in every strait.

Consid. 3. If it be bad now, it might have been worse; hath God denied thee the comforts of this life? He might have denied thee Christ, peace, and pardon also, and then thy case had been woful indeed. You know God hath done so to millions in the world: how many such wretched objects may your eyes behold every day, that have no comfort in hand, nor yet in hope, are miserable here, and will be so to eternity; that have a bitter cup, and nothing to sweeten it; no, not so much as an hope that it will be better. But it is not so with you, though you be poor in this world, "yet rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which God hath promised," Jam. 2:5. O learn to set spiritual riches over against temporal poverty. Balance all your present troubles with your spiritual privileges. Indeed if God had denied your souls the robes of righteousness to clothe them, the hidden manna to feed them, the heavenly mansions to receive them; if your souls were left destitute as well as your bodies, you might well be pensive; but this consideration hath enough to bring the considering soul to rest under any outward strait. It was bravely said by Luther, when want began to pinch him, 'Let us be contented with our hard fare (said he,) for do not we feast with angels upon Christ the bread of life?' "And blessed be God (saith Paul) who hath abounded to us in all spiritual blessings," Eph. 1:3.

Consid. 4. This affliction, though great, is not such an affliction but God hath far greater, with which he chastises the dearly beloved of his soul in this world: and should he remove this, and inflict those, you would account your present state a very comfortable state, and bless God to be as now you are.

What think ye, sirs? Should God remove your present troubles, supply all your outward wants, give you the desire of your hearts in creature comforts, but hide his face from you, shoot his arrows into your souls, and cause the venom of them to drink up your spirits? Should he leave you but a few days to the buffeting of Satan, and his

blasphemous injections; should he hold your eyes but a few nights waking with horrors of conscience, tossing to and fro till the dawning of the day: should he lead you through the chambers of death, shew you the visions of darkness, and make his terrors set themselves in array against you: Then tell me if you would not count it a choice mercy to be back again in your former necessitous condition, with peace of conscience; and count bread and water, with God's favour, a happy state? O then, take heed of repining. Say not God deals hardly with you, lest you provoke him to convince you, by your own sense and feeling, that he hath worse rods than these for unsubmissive and froward children.

Consid. 5. If it be bad now, it will be better shortly.

O keep thy heart by that consideration: the meal in the barrel is almost spent; well, be it so, why should that trouble me, if I am almost beyond the need and use of all these things. The traveller hath spent almost all his money, but a shilling or two left: well, saith he, though my money be almost spent, yet my journey is almost finished too; I am near home, and then I shall be fully supplied. If there be no candles in the house, yet it is a comfort to think that it is almost day, and then there will be no need of candles. I am afraid, Christian, thou misreckonest thyself when thou thinkest thy provision is almost spent, and you have a great way to travel: many years to live, and nothing to live upon; it may not be half so many as thou supposest; in this be confident, if thy provision be spent, either fresh supplies are coming, though thou seest not from whence, or thou art nearer thy journey's end than thou reckonest thyself to be. Desponding soul, doth it become a man or woman travelling upon the road to the heavenly city, and almost arrived there, within a few day's journey of his Father's house, where all his wants shall be supplied, to take on thus about a little meat, drink, or clothes which he fears he shall want by the way? It was a noble saying of the forty Martyrs, famous in the Ecclesiastical story, when turned out naked in a frosty night to be starved to death, with these words they comforted one another, *δριμυς ο χειμων*, &c. The winter indeed is sharp and cold, but

heaven is warm and comfortable; here we shiver for cold, but Abraham's bosom will make amends for all.

## **Objections**

Objection 1. But I may die for want.

Solution (1.) Who ever did so? When were the righteous forsaken?  
(2.) If so, your journey is ended, and you are fully supplied.

Objec. 2. But I am not sure of that; were I sure of heaven, it were another matter.

Sol. Are you not sure of that? Then you have other matters to trouble yourselves about than these: methinks these should be the least of all your cares: I do not find that souls perplexed and troubled about the want of Christ, pardon of sin, &c. are usually very anxious, or solicitous about these things. He that seriously puts such questions as these, What shall I do to be saved? How shall I know my sin is pardoned? doth not usually trouble himself with, "What shall I eat, what shall I drink, or wherewithal shall I be clothed?"

Consid. 6. Doth it become the children of such a Father to distrust his all-sufficiency, or repine at any of his dispensations;

Do you well to question his care and love upon every new exigence? Say, have you not been ashamed of this formerly? Hath not your Father's seasonable provisions for you in former straits, put you to the blush, and made you resolve never to question his love and care any more? and yet will you renew your unworthy suspicions of him again? Disingenuous child! reason thus with thyself; if I perish for want of what is good and needful for me, it must either be because my Father knows not my wants, or hath not wherewith to supply them: or else regards not what becomes of me. Which of these shall I charge upon him? Not the first; for, Mark 6:32. "My Father knows what I have need of;" my condition is not hid from him: nor the second, "For the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness of it," Psal. 24:1.

His name is God all-sufficient, Gen. 17:1. Not the last, for, "as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear him," Ps. 103:13. "The Lord is exceedingly pitiful, and of tender mercy," Jam. 5:11. "He hears the young ravens when they cry," Job 38:41 and will he not hear me? "Consider, saith Christ, the fowls of the air," Matth. 6:26. Not the fowls at the door, that are every day fed by hand, but the fowls of the air that have none to provide for them. Doth he feed and clothe his enemies, and will he forget his children? He heard the very cry of Ishmael in distress, Gen. 21:17. O my unbelieving heart! dost thou yet doubt? Remember Hagar and the child.

Consid. 7. Your poverty is not your sin, but your affliction only! If by sinful means you have not brought it upon yourselves; and if it be but an affliction, it may be borne the easier for that.

It is hard indeed to bear an affliction coming upon us as the fruit and punishment of sin; when men are under trouble upon that account, they use to say, O! if it were but a single affliction coming from the hand of God by way of trial, I could bear it, but I have brought it upon myself by sin, it comes as the punishment of sin: the marks of God's displeasure are upon it; it is the guilt within that troubles and galls more than the want without.

But it is not so here, and therefore you have no reason to be cast down under it.

## **Objections**

Objection. 1. But though there be no sting of guilt, yet this condition wants not other stings: As first, the discredit of religion; I cannot comply with mine engagements in the world, and thereby religion is like to suffer.

Solution. It is well you have an heart to discharge every duty, yet if God disable you by providence, it is no discredit to your profession, because you do not that which you cannot do, so long as it is your desire and endeavour to do what you can and ought to do; and in this

case God's will is, that lenity and forbearance be exercised towards you, Deut. 24:12, 13.

Object. 2. But it grieves me to behold the necessities of others whom I was wont to relieve and refresh, but now cannot.

Sol. If you cannot, it ceases to be your duty, and God accepts the drawing out of your soul to the hungry in compassion and desire to help them, though you cannot draw forth a full purse to relieve and supply them.

Object. 3. But I find such a condition full of temptations, a sore clog in the way to heaven.

Sol. Every condition in the world hath its clogs and attending temptations; and were you in a prosperous condition, you might there meet with more temptations and fewer advantages than you now have: For though I confess poverty hath its temptations as well as prosperity, yet I am confident prosperity hath not these excellent advantages that poverty hath: For here you have an opportunity to discover the sincerity of your love to God, when you can live upon him, and find enough in him, and constantly follow him, even when all external inducements and motives fail. And thus I have shewed you how to keep your hearts from the temptations and dangers attending a poor and low condition in the world, when want pinches, and the heart begins to sink, then improve and bless God for these helps to keep it.

Season 6. 'The sixth season of expressing this diligence in keeping the heart, is the season of duty; when we draw nigh to God in public, private, or secret duties, then it is time to look to the heart; for the vanity of the heart seldom discovers itself more than at such times. How oft doth the poor soul cry out, O Lord! how fain would I serve thee, but vain thoughts will not let me; I came to open my heart to thee, to delight my soul in communion with thee, but my corruptions have set upon me; Lord, call off these vain thoughts, and suffer them

not to prostitute the soul which is espoused to thee before thy face.'  
The sixth case then is this,

## **Keeping the Heart in the Time of Duty**

Case 6. How the heart may be kept from distractions by vain thoughts, in the time of duty.

There is a twofold distraction or wandering of the heart in duty: (1.) Voluntary and habitual, Psalm 78:8. "They set not their hearts aright, and their spirit was not steadfast with God." This is the case of formalists, and proceeds from the want of an holy bent and inclination of the heart to God; their hearts are under the power of their lust, and therefore it is no wonder they go after their lust, even when they are about holy things, Ezek. 33:31. (2.) Involuntary and lamented distractions, Rom. 7:21–24. "I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me; O wretched man that I am," &c. This proceeds not from the want of a holy bent and aim, but from the weakness and imperfection of grace. And in this case the soul may make the like complaint against its own corruptions that Abijah did against Jeroboam, 2 Chron. 13:6, 7. "Yet Jeroboam the son of Nebat is risen up against his lord, when Rehoboam was young and tender-hearted, and could not withstand him, and there are gathered unto him vain men, the children of Belial." Grace hath dominion, but lusts are mutinous and seditious, during the infancy thereof. But it is not my business to shew you how these distractions come into the heart, but rather how to get and keep them out of the heart: in order whereunto take these ten following helps.

### **Helps**

Help 1. Sequester yourselves from all earthly employments, and set apart some time for solemn preparation to meet God in duty: You come reeking hot out of the world into God's presence, but you will find a tang of it in your duties: It is with the heart a few minutes

since plunged in the world, now at the feet of God, just as with the sea after a storm, which still continues working, muddy, and disquiet, though the wind be laid, and the storm over: Thy heart must have sometime to settle. There are few musicians that can take down a lute or viol, and play presently upon it, without some time to tune it; there are few Christians can presently say, as Psal. 57:7. "O God, my heart is fixed, it is fixed." O when thou goest to God in any duty, take thy heart aside, and say, O my soul, I am now addressing myself to the greatest work that ever a creature was employed about: I am going into the awful presence of God about business of everlasting moment.

Oh my soul, leave trifling now, be composed, watchful, serious, this is no common-work; it is God-work, soul-work, eternity-work. I am now going forth bearing seed, which will bring forth fruit to life or death in the world to come; pause a while upon thy sins, wants, troubles; keep thy thoughts a while on these before thou address thyself to duty. David first mused, and then spake with his tongue, Psalm 39:3, 4. So Psal. 45:1. "My heart is inditing," &c.

Help 2. Having composed the heart by previous meditation, presently set a guard upon thy senses: How often are poor Christians in danger of losing the eyes of their mind by those of their body; for this Job covenanted with his senses, chap. 31:1. for this David prayed, Psal. 119:37. "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken thou me in thy way." This may serve to expound that mystical Arabian proverb, which advises to 'shut the windows that the house may be light:' it were excellent if you could say in your outsets upon duty, as an holy man once did, when he came off from duty: *Claudimini, oculi mei, claudimini*, &c. 'Be shut, O mine eyes, be shut: for it is impossible you should ever see such beauty and glory in any creature, as I have now seen in God.' You had need avoid all occasions of distraction from without, for be sure you will meet enough from within. Intention of spirit in the work of God, locks up the eye and ear against vanity. When Marcellus entered the gates of Syracuse, Archimedes was so intent about his mathematical scheme,



that he took no notice of the soldiers when they entered his very study with drawn swords; a fervent cannot be a vagrant heart.

Help 3. Beg of God a mortified fancy. A working fancy, saith one, how much soever it be extolled among men, is a great snare to the soul: except it work in fellowship with right reason, and a sanctified heart: The phantasy is a power of the soul placed between the senses and the understanding, it is that which first stirs itself in the soul, and by its motions the other powers are stirred; it is the common shop where thoughts are first forged and framed, and as this is, so are they; if imaginations be not first cast down, it is impossible that every thought of the heart should be brought into obedience to Christ, 2 Cor. 10:5. The fancy is naturally the wildest and most untameable power in the soul. Some Christians, especially such as are of hot and dry constitutions, have much to do with it.

And truly, the more spiritual the heart is, the more it is troubled about the vanity and wildness of it. O what a sad thing it is! that thy nobler soul must lackey up and down after a vain and roving fancy, that such a beggar should ride on horse-back, and such a prince run after on foot; that it should call off the soul from attendance upon God, when it is most sweetly engaged in communion with him, to prosecute such vanities as it will start at such times before it! beg earnestly of God that the power of sanctification may once come upon it. Some Christians have attained such a degree of sanctification of their fancies, that they have had much sweetness left upon their hearts by the spiritual workings of it in the night-season: When thy fancy is more mortified, thy thoughts will be more orderly and fixed.

Help 4. If thou wouldst keep thy heart from those vain excursions, realize to thyself by faith, the holy and awful presence of God in duties.

If the presence of a grave man will compose us to seriousness, how much more the presence of an holy God? Thinkest thou thy soul

durst be so gay and light, if the sense of a divine eye were upon it? Remember the place where thou art is the place of his feet, Isa. 60:13. act faith upon the omniscieny of God. "All the churches shall know that I am he that searcheth the heart, trieth the reins, and I will give to every one of you according to your works," Rev. 2:23. "All things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do," Heb. 4:12. Realize his infinite holiness; into what a serious, composed frame did the sight of God, in his holiness, put the spirit of the prophet? Isa. 6:5. Labour also to get upon thy heart due apprehensions of the greatness of God, such as Abraham had, Gen. 18:27. "I that am but dust and ashes have taken upon me to speak to God." And lastly, remember the jealousy of God, how tender he is over his worship, Lev. 10:3. "And Moses said to Aaron, This is that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified."

'A man that is praying (saith Bernard) should behave himself as if he were entering into the court of heaven, where he sees the Lord upon his throne, surrounded with ten thousand of his angels and saints ministering unto him.' When thou comest from a duty in which thy heart hath been toying and wandering, thou mayest say, Verily God was in this place, and I knew it not. Suppose all the impertinencies and vanities which have past through thine heart in duty were written out, and interlined with thy petitions, couldest thou have the face to present to God? Should thy tongue but utter all the thoughts of thy heart in prayer, would not men abhor thee? Why thy thoughts are vocal to God, Psal. 139:2. If thou wert petitioning the king for thy life, would it not provoke him to see thee playing with thy bandstrings, or catching at every fly that lights upon thy clothes, whilst thou art speaking to him about such serious matters? O think sadly upon that scripture, Psalm 87:7. "God is greatly to be feared in the assemblies of his saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are round about him?" Why did God ascend in thunderings and lightnings, and dark clouds upon Sinai? Exod. 19:16–18. Why did the mountains smoke under him? The people quake and tremble round about him, yea, Moses himself not exempted? but to teach the

people, that great truth, Heb. 12:28, 29. "Let us have grace whereby we may serve him acceptably, with reverence and godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire!" Present God thus before thee, and thy vain heart will quickly be reduced to a more serious frame.

Help 5. Maintain a praying frame of heart in the intervals of duty. What is the reason our hearts are so dull, careless and wandering, when we come to hear or pray, but because there have been such long intermissions in our communion with God; by reason whereof the heart is out of a praying frame? If that spiritual warmth, those holy impressions we carry from God in one duty, were but preserved to kindle another duty, it would be of marvellous advantage to keep the heart intent and serious with God.

To this purpose those intermediate ejaculations betwixt stated and solemn duties, are of most sweet and excellent use; by these one duty is as it were linked to another, and so the soul, as it were, wraps up itself in a chain of duties. That Christian seldom misses his mark in solemn duty, that shoots up many of these darts in the intervals of duty. It is an excellent commendation Christ bestows upon the spouse, Cant. 4:11. "Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb." Upon which text one gives this sweet note; The honeycomb drops actually but sometimes, but it always hangs full of sweet drops ready to fall; If our ejaculations were more, our lamentations upon this account would be fewer.

Help 6. Endeavour to engage and raise thy affections to God in duty, if thou wouldest have thy distractions cured.

A dropping eye, and a melting heart, are seldom troubled as others are upon this account: When the soul is intent upon any work, it gathers in its strength, and bends all the thoughts about it; and when it is deeply affected, it will be intent: the affections command the thoughts to go after them; deadness causes distraction, and distraction increases deadness; Could you but look upon duties as the galleries of communion in which you walk with God, where your

souls may be filled with those ravishing and matchless delights that are in his presence, your soul would not offer to stir from thence.

It is with the heart in duty as it is with those that dig for golden ore; they try here, and finding none, try there; and so go from place to place, till at last they hit upon the rich vein, and there they sit down. If thy heart could but once hit the rich vein in duty, it would dwell and abide there with delight and constancy. "O how I love thy law, it is my meditation day and night!" Psal. 119:97. The soul could dwell day and night upon its knees, when once its delights, loves, and desires are engaged. What is the reason your hearts are so shuffling, especially in secret duties! Why are you ready to be gone, almost as soon as you are come into the presence of God, but because your affections are not engaged?

Help 7. Mourn over the matter to God, and call in assistance from heaven, when vain thoughts assault thy heart in duty.

When the messenger of Satan buffeted Paul by wicked injections, as is supposed, he goes to God, and mourns over it before him, 2 Cor. 12:8 never slight wandering thoughts in duty as small matters: follow every vain thought with a deep sigh, turning thee to God with such words as these: Lord, I came hither to speak with thee, and here a busy devil and a vain heart conspiring together have set upon me. O my God! what an heart have I? Shall I never wait upon thee without distraction! when shall I enjoy an hour of free communion with thee? Help me, my God, this once; do but display thy glory before mine eye, and my heart shall quickly be recovered; Thou knowest I came hither to enjoy thee, and shall I go away without thee? See how the heart of thy poor child works towards thee! strives to get near thee, but cannot: My heart is aground, "come thou north-wind, blow south-wind," O for a fresh gale now from thy Spirit, to set my affections a-float! Couldst thou but thus affectionately bewail thy distractions to God, thou mightest obtain help and deliverance from them: He would say to Satan and thine imperious lusts, as Ahasuerus

said of Haman, What, will he force the queen before my face? Who are these that set upon my child in my work and presence?

Help 8. Look upon the success and sweetness of thy duties, as very much depending upon the keeping of thy heart close with God in them.

These two things, the success and sweetness of duty, are as dear to a Christian as his two eyes; and both of these must necessarily be lost, if the heart be lost in duty. Job 35:13. "Surely God heareth not vanity, neither doth the Almighty regard it." The promise is made to an heart engaged, Jer. 29:13. "Then shall ye seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your hearts." Well then, when thou findest thy heart under the power of deadness and distraction, say to thy soul, O what do I lose by a careless heart now! my praying times are the choicest parts, the golden spots of all my time: Could I but get up this heart with God, I might now obtain such mercies as would be matter for a song to all eternity.

Help 9. Look upon it as a great discovery of the sincerity or hypocrisy of your hearts, according as you find them careful or careless in this matter.

Nothing will startle an upright heart more than this: What, shall I give way to a customary wandering of heart from God? Shall the spot of the hypocrite appear upon my soul? They indeed can drudge on in the round of duty, never regarding the frames of their hearts, Ezek. 33:31, 32 but shall I do so? When men come into the presence-chamber, and the king is not there, they bow to the empty chair. O never let me be satisfied with empty duties! never let me take my leave of a duty "until mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

Help 10. Lastly, It will be of special use to keep thine heart with God in duties, to consider what influence all thy duties have into thy eternity.

These are your seed-times, and what you sow in your duties in this world, you must look to reap the fruits of it in another world, Gal. 6:7, 8. If you sow to the flesh, of that you shall reap corruption; but if to the Spirit, life everlasting. O my soul, answer seriously, wouldst thou be willing to reap the fruit of vanity in the world to come? Darest thou say, when thy thoughts are roving to the ends of the earth in duty, when thou scarce mindest what thou sayest or hearest; now, Lord, I am sowing to the Spirit; now I am providing and laying up for eternity; now I am seeking for glory, honour, and immortality; now I am striving to enter in at the strait gate; now I am taking the kingdom of heaven by an holy violence? O such a consideration as this should make the multitudes of vain thoughts that press in upon the heart in duty, to fly seven ways before it. And thus I have shewn you how to keep your hearts in the times of duty.

## **Keeping the Heart from Revengeful Motions, Under the Greatest Injuries and Abuses From Men**

Season 7. 'The seventh season calling for more than common diligence to keep the heart, is, when we receive injuries and abuses from men. Such is the depravedness and corruption of man in his collapsed state, that homo homini lupus, one man is become a wolf, a tyger, to another: They are, as the prophet complains, Hab. 1:14. As the fishes of the sea, and as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them;" and as wicked men are cruel and oppressive one to another, so they conspire together to abuse and wrong the people of God, as the same prophet complains, ver. 13. "The wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he." Now when we are thus abused and wronged, it is hard to keep the heart from revengeful motions: to make it meekly and quietly to commit the cause to him that judgeth righteously; to exercise no other affection but pity towards them that abuse us. Surely the spirit that is in us lusteth to revenge, but it must not be so; you have choice helps in the gospel to

keep down your hearts from such sinful motions against your enemies, and to sweeten your embittered spirits.' The seventh case then shall be this,

Case 7. How a Christian may keep his heart from revengeful motions, under the greatest injuries and abuses from men.

The gospel, indeed, allows a liberty to vindicate our innocency, and assert our rights, but not to vent our corruptions, and invade God's right. When therefore thou findest thy heart begin to be inflamed by revengeful motions, presently apply the following remedies; and the first is this,

### **Remedies**

Remedy 1. Urge upon thy heart the severe prohibitions of revenge by the law of God. Remember that this is forbidden fruit, how pleasant and luscious soever it be to our vitiated appetites. O, saith nature, revenge is sweet: O but, saith God, the effects thereof shall be bitter. How plainly hath God interdicted this flesh-pleasing sin, Prov. 20:22. "Say not I will recompense evil." Prov. 24:29. "Say not I will do so to him as he hath done to me." Rom. 12:17. "Recompence to no man evil for evil." And ver. 19. "Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place to wrath." Nay, that is not all; but Prov. 25:21. "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink." The word feed him, as critics observe, signifies to feed cheerfully, and tenderly, as birds do their young ones: The scripture is a great friend to the peace and tranquillity of human society, which can never be preserved if revenge be not deposed. It was wont to be an argument urged by the Christians to prove their religion to be supernatural and pure that forbids revenge, which is so sweet to nature; and verily it is a thousand pities such an argument should be lost. Well, then, awe your hearts with the authority of God in these scriptures, and when carnal reason saith, mine enemy deserves to be hated, let conscience reply, but doth God deserve to be disobeyed? Thus and thus hath he done, and so he hath wronged me; but what hath God done that I

should wrong him? If he dare be so bold to break the peace, shall I be so wicked to break the precept? If he fears not to wrong me, shall not I fear to wrong God? O let the fear of God's threatenings repress such sinful motions.

Remedy 2. Set before your eyes the most eminent patterns of meekness and forgiveness, that your souls may fall in love with them. This is the way to cut off those common pleas of the flesh for revenge: As thus no man would bear such an affront: Yes, such and such have borne as bad and worse. I shall be reckoned a coward, a fool, if I pass by this: No matter, as long as I follow the examples of the wisest and holiest of men; never did any suffer more and greater abuses from men than Christ did, and never did any carry it more peaceably and forgivingly, Isa. 53:7. "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he was brought as a lamb to the slaughter," &c. This pattern of our Lord the apostle sets before you for your imitation, 1 Pet. 2:21, 22, 23. "For even hereunto are you called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps: Who when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." To be of a meek, forgiving spirit, is Christ-like, God-like; "then shall you be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise upon the evil and upon the good, and sendeth rain on the just and unjust," Matth. 5:45. How eminently also did the Spirit of Christ rest upon his apostles? Never were there such men upon earth for true excellency of spirit. None were ever abused more, or suffered their abuses better. "Being reviled (say they) we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat," 1 Cor. 4:12, 13. Mr. Calvin, though a man of a quick spirit, yet had attained such a degree of this Christ-like forgiveness, that when Luther had used some opprobrious language of him, the good man said no more but this, 'Although he should call me devil, yet I will acknowledge him to be an eminent servant of Jesus Christ.'



I have often heard it reported of holy Mr. Dod, that when one, enraged at his close, convincing doctrine, picked a quarrel with him, smote him on the face, and dashed out two of his teeth; this meek servant of Christ spit out the teeth and blood into his hand, and said, See, here, you have knocked out two of my teeth, and that without any just provocation; but on condition I might do your soul good, I would give you leave to dash out all the rest. Here is the excellency of a Christian's spirit, above all the attainments of moral heathens: Though they were excellent in many other things, yet they could never attain this forgiving spirit. It is the first office of justice, said Tully, to hurt no body, unless first provoked by an injury; whereupon Lactantius, *O quam simplicem veramque sententiam, duorum verberam adjectione, corrupit!* What a dainty sentence spoiled the orator, by adding those two last words! Strive then for this excellency of spirit, which is the proper excellency of Christians; do some singular thing that others cannot do, and then you will have a testimony in their consciences. When Moses out-did the magicians, they were forced to confess the finger of God in that business.

Remedy 3. Consider well the quality of the person that hath wronged thee: either he is a good man, or a wicked man, that hath done thee the injury: If he be a good man, there is light and tenderness in his conscience, and that will bring him at last to a sense of the evil he hath done; however, Christ hath forgiven him greater injuries than these, and why shouldst not thou? Will Christ not upbraid him with any of those wrongs done to him, but frankly forgive them all; and wilt thou take him by the throat for some petty abuse that he hath done to thee?

Or is he a wicked man? If so, truly you have more need to exercise pity, than revenge towards him, and that upon a double account: For, (1.) He is beside himself, so indeed is every unconverted sinner, Luke 15:17. Should you go into Bedlam, and there hear one rail at you, another mock you, and a third threaten you; would you say I will be revenged upon them? No, you would rather go away pitying them!

Alas, poor creatures! they are out of their wits, and know not what they do. Besides,

(2.) There is a day coming, if they repent not, when they will have more misery than you can find in your hearts to wish them; you need not study to revenge, God's vengeance sleepeth not, and will shortly take place upon them, and is not that enough? Have they not an eternity of misery coming? If they repent not, this must be the portion of their cup; and if ever they do repent, they will be ready to make you reparation.

Remedy 4. Keep down thy heart by this consideration, that by revenge thou canst but satisfy a lust, but by forgiveness thou shalt conquer a lust.

Suppose by revenge thou shouldst destroy one enemy, I will shew thee how, by forgiving, thou shalt conquer three, thine own lust, the devil's temptation, and thine enemy's heart; and is not this a more glorious conquest? If by revenge thou overcome thine enemy, yet (as Bernard saith) *Infelix victoria, ubi superans virum secumbit vitio*: Unhappy victory, when, by overcoming another man, thou art overcome by thine own corruption. But this way you may obtain a glorious conquest indeed. What an honourable and dry victory, did David this way obtain over Saul, 1 Sam. 24:16, 17. "And it came to pass, when David had made an end of speaking these words, that Saul lifted up his voice, and wept; and he said to David, thou art more righteous than I."

It must be a very disingenuous nature indeed, upon which meekness and forgiveness will not work; a stony heart, which this fire will not melt. To this sense is that, Prov. 25:21. "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head." Some will have it a sin-punishing fire, but others a heart-melting fire. To be sure it will either melt his heart, or aggravate his misery. Augustine thinks that Stephen's prayer for his enemies was the great means of Paul's conversion.

Remedy 5. Seriously propound this question to thy oxen heart, have I got any good by the wrongs and injuries received, or have I not? If they have done you no good, turn the revenge upon yourselves: O that I should have such a bad heart, that can get no good out of such troubles! O that my spirit should be so unlike to Christ's! The patience and meekness of other Christians, have turned all the injuries thrown at them into precious stones; the spirits of others have been raised in blessing God, when they have been loaded with reproaches from the world, they have bound them as an ornament to their necks. *Superbus fio* (said Luther) *quod video nomen pessimum mihi crescere*. I could even be proud upon it, that I have a bad name among wicked men. To the same purpose Jerom said sweetly, *Gratia ago Deo meo quod dignus sum quem mundus orderit*; I thank my God that I am worthy to be hated of the world. Thus their hearts were provoked by injuries to magnify God, and bless him for them; if it work contrary with me, I have cause enough to be filled with self-displeasancy.

If you have got any good by them; if the reproaches and wrongs you have received, have made you search your hearts the more, watch your ways the more narrowly; if their wronging you, has made you see how you have wronged God, then let me say for them, as Paul did himself, Pray forgive them this wrong.

What! can you not find an heart to forgive one that hath been instrumental of so much good to you! That is strange! what though they meant it for evil? yet if God hath turned it to good, you have no more reason to rage against the instrument than he had who received a wound from his enemy which only brake, and let out that imposthume which otherwise had been his death.

Remedy 6. It is of excellent use to keep the heart from revenge, to look up, and eye the first cause by which all our troubles are ordered.

This will calm and meeken our spirits quickly: never did a wicked tongue try the patience of a saint, more than David's was tried by

that railing Shimei; yet the spirit of this good man was not at all poisoned with revenge, though he goes along cursing, and casting stones at him, all the way. Yea, though Abishai offered David, if he pleased, the head of that enemy; yet the king said, "What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruah? So let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, curse David: who then shall say, Wherefore hast thou done so?" It may be, God uses him as his rod, to lash me, because I, by my sin, made his enemies to blaspheme him; and shall I be angry with the rod? How irrational were that? This also was it that quieted Job; he doth not rail, and vow revenge upon the Chaldeans and Sabeans, but eyes God as the orderer of those troubles, and is quiet; "The Lord hath taken away, blessed be his name," Job 1:21.

Objection. But you will say, To turn aside the right of a man, to subvert a man in his cause, the Lord approveth not, Lam. 3:36.

Answer. True: but though it fall not under his approving, yet it doth under his permitting will, and there is a great argument for quiet submission in that; nay, he hath not only the permitting, but the ordering of all those troubles. Did we see more of an holy God, we should shew less of a corrupt nature in such trials.

Remedy 7. Consider how you daily wrong God, and you will not be so easily inflamed with revenge against others that have wronged you.

You are daily grieving, and wronging God, and yet he bears, forgives, and will not take vengeance upon you; and will you be so quick in avenging yourselves upon others? O what a sharp and terrible rebuke is that! Mat. 18:32, 33. "O thou wicked and slothful servant! I forgave thee all that debt because thou desirest me, shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?" None should be so filled with bowels of pity, forbearance, and mercy, to such as wrong them, as those should be that have experienced the riches of mercy themselves: methinks the mercy of God to us should melt our very bowels into mercy over others; it is impossible we can be cruel to others, except we forget how kind

Christ hath been to us. Those that have found mercy, should shew mercy: if kindness cannot work, methinks fear should. "If you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you your trespasses," Mat. 6:15.

Remedy 8. Lastly, Let the consideration of the day of the Lord, which draweth nigh, withhold your hands from anticipating it by acts of revenge.

Why are you so quick? Is not the Lord at hand, to avenge all his abused servants? "Be patient therefore, my brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold the husbandman waiteth, &c. Be ye also patient, for the coming of the Lord draws nigh: Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned. Behold the Judge standeth at the door," Jam. 5:7, 8, 9. This text affords three arguments against revenge: (1.) The Lord's near approach. (2.) The example of the husbandman's patience. (3.) The danger we draw upon ourselves by anticipating God's judgment; Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord; he will distribute justice more equally, and impartially, than you can: they who believe they have a God to right them, will not so much wrong themselves, as avenge their own wrongs.

Objection 1. But flesh and blood are not able to bear such abuses.

Solution. If you resolve to consult flesh and blood in such cases, and do no more but what that will enable you to do; never pretend to religion: Christians must do singular and supernatural things.

Object. 2. But if I put up such abuses, I shall be reckoned a fool, and every one will trample upon me.

Sol. (1.) You may be reckoned so among fools, but God and good men will account it your wisdom, and the excellency of your spirits. (2.) It must be a base spirit indeed that will trample upon a meek and forgiving Christian: and thus learn to keep your hearts from revenge under all provocations.

## Keeping the Heart When We Meet with Great Crosses and Provocations

Season 8. 'The next season in which we are in danger of losing our hearts is, when we meet with great crosses and provocations; then sinful passion is apt to transport the heart. It is the fault of many good men to be of hasty and quick spirits, when provoked, though they dare not concoct anger into malice; for that would be a note of wickedness: yet are they very incident to sudden anger, which is a sign of weakness.'"\* Beza, in the life of Calvin, observes, that he was of a keen and hasty spirit;' and he that writes the life of the great Cameron,\* saith, 'that his anger was soon stirred towards his near and familiar friends, but then he would easily depose it and acknowledge his weakness.' Alas! when provocations and trials of our patience come, we know not what spirit we are of. The eighth case therefore is this,

Case 8. How the heart may be kept meek and patient under great crosses and provocations.

There are three sorts of anger, natural, holy, and sinful anger. (1.) Natural, which is nothing else but the motion of the irascible appetite towards an offensive object; and this in itself is no sin, they are propassions, rather than passions; the infelicities, rather than the sins of nature, as Jerom calls them. Reason, saith Plutarch, is the driver, the soul is the chariot, and the two horses that draw it on in all its motions, are the concupiscible and irascible appetites; whilst these are rightly managed by reason, they are not only lawful, but very useful to the soul. God would not have us to be stupid and insensate, though he would have us to be meek and patient. In Eph. 4:26. he allows the natural motion, but forbids the sinful exorbitancy. (2.) Holy anger, which is a pure flame, kindled by an heavenly spark of love to God, and in scripture is called zeal, which is, as one saith, the dagger which love draws in God's quarrel. Such was Lot's against the Sodomites, and that of Moses against the

idolatrous Israelites. When Servetus condemned Zuinglius for his harshness, his answer was, *In aliis mansuetus ero, in blasphemiiis in Christum, non ita*; In other cases I will be mild, but in the cause of Christ not so. That which the world calls moderation and mildness here, is in God's account stupidity and cowardliness; neither of these are that which I am now persuading you to keep your hearts against. But, (3.) There is a sinful passion, that is the thing which endangers you. Now anger becomes sinful when it is either causeless, *Mat. 5:22.* or excessive; and that either in measure or time, exceeding the value of the impulsive cause, be it more transient or abiding; yet it is a sin, and it is matter of humiliation before God. Now the means to keep the heart from it under provocations, are these:

## **Means**

Means 1. Get low and humble thoughts of yourselves, and then you will have meek spirits, and peaceable deportments towards others.

The humble is ever the patient man; pride is the root of passion; a lofty will be a surly spirit; bladders blown up with wind, will not lie close together; but prick them, and you may pack a thousand in a little room: "Only by pride cometh contention," *Prov. 13:10.* When we over-rate ourselves, then we think we are unworthily treated by others, and that provokes; and here, by the way, take notice of one great benefit of acquaintance with your own hearts, even the meekening and calming of your spirits. Christian, methinks thou wouldst know so much of thyself, that it is impossible any should lay thee lower, or have baser thoughts of thee than thou hast of thyself. Some render the original of that text, *Hab. 2:5.* thus: "The proud man is as he that transgresseth by wine;" and drunkards, you know, are quarrelsome. O get more humility, and that will bring you more peace.

Means 2. Be often sweetening your spirits in communion with God, and they will not easily be embittered with wrath towards men.

A quiet conscience never produced an unquiet conversation: the peace of God doth βαβευειν, rule in the heart, as an umpire appeasing strifes; for so much that word, Col. 3:15. imports. Wrath and strife are hugely opposite to the frame and temper of a spiritual heart, because inconsistent with the delight and contentment of that dove-like spirit which loves a sedate and quiet breast. O! saith the soul that feeds upon the sweet communion of the Spirit, shall the sparks of provocations now catch in my passions, and raise such a smoke in my soul, as will offend and drive away the Comforter from me? This is so effectual a remedy against passion, that I durst almost venture, in a Christian of a hasty nature, to make long-suffering a sign of communion with God. Seest thou such a Christian quiet and calm under provocations, it is very like his soul feeds upon such sweetness in God as he is loth to leave; and on the other side, seest thou a Christian turbulent and clamorous, doubtless, all is not well within; his spirit is like a bone out of joint, which cannot move without pain and trouble.

Means 3. Get due apprehensions of the evil nature and effects of sinful anger: *Ira furor brevis*; anger is a short madness, (saith one;) *Ira animæ febris* (saith another;) anger is the fever of the soul; It is the interregnum and eclipse of reason, (saith a third).

The effects of it are also very sad.

(1.) "It grieves the Spirit of God," Eph. 4:30. banishes him from that breast in which it rages and tumultuates: God is the God of peace; the presence and comforts of God are only enjoyed in a calm. It is a golden note one gives upon the forecited text, God doth not usually bless with peace of conscience, such as make no conscience of peace.

(2.) It gives advantage to the devil, Eph. 4:26, 27. Satan is an angry and discontented spirit, and finds no rest but in restless hearts? he lives like the salamander, in fires of contention; he bestirs himself when the spirits are in a commotion; sometimes he fills the heart with revengeful thoughts, sometimes he fills the lips, and inflames the tongue with indecent language; even a meek Moses sometimes



speaks unadvisedly with his lips. (3.) It dis-tunes the spirit for duty; upon this account the apostle dissuades husbands and wives from jarring carriages and contentions, that their prayers be not hindered, 1 Pet. 3:7. All acts of worship must be suitable to the object of worship; but God is the God of peace, the God of love. (4.) To mention no more, it disparages the Christian religion. How would Plato and Pythagoras shame us, if they were now living? Christ was a lamb for meekness, and doth it become his followers to be like lions? O keep your hearts, or you will at once lose not only your own peace, but the credit of religion.

Means 4. Consider how sweet a thing it is to a Christian to conquer his corruptions, and carry away the spoils of them.

"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city," Prov. 16:32. Is there any content in venting a passion? How much more in mortifying it? When thou comest in a calm mood, or upon a death-bed to-review thy life, how comfortable then will it be to reflect upon the conquests thou hast got by the fear of God, over the evil propensions of thine own heart! It was a memorable saying of Valentinian the emperor when he came to die: 'Amongst all my conquests (said he) 'there is but one that now comforts me; and being asked what that was, he answered, I have overcome my worst enemy, mine own naughty heart.'

Means 5. Shame yourselves by setting before you those eminent patterns that have been most excellent for meekness.

Above all, compare your spirits with the Spirit of Christ: "Learn of me (saith he,) for I am meek and lowly," Mat. 11:29. Christ was meek and lowly, but I am proud and passionate; it was the high commendation of Moses, Num. 12:3. "Now the man Moses was meek above all the men of the earth: and this was the man that knew God to face." It is said of Calvin and Ursin, that they both were of choleric natures, but yet had so learned the meekness of Christ as not to utter

one word, under the greatest provocation, un-beseeming religion. When I read the pretty stories of the very heathens that never had the advantages that we have, how the Pythagoreans, whatever feuds had been among them in the day, would hush all by sending to each other this message, The sun is almost set; and that of Plato to his scholar, I would beat thee if I were not angry.

When I read what lenity and tenderness Lycurgus shewed to an insolent fellow that had struck out one of his eyes, I am ashamed to see how much Christians are out-shot by heathens; who, by mere moral arguments and precepts, had thus meekened their spirits, and conquered their passions. The dim light of nature could teach Seneca to say, That anger will hurt a man more than the offence; for there is a certain bound in the offence, but I know not how far mine anger will carry me. It is a shame that these men who came so far behind us in means and advantages, should so far out-strip us in meekness and patience.

Means 6. Lastly, Avoid all irritating occasions.

He that will not hear the clapper, must not pull the rope: "Grievous words stir up anger," saith Solomon, Prov. 16:1. Do not only pray, and resolve against it, but get as far as you can out of the way of it, it is true spiritual valour, to run as fast, and as far as we can, out of sin's way: If you can but avoid anger in its first rise, there is no great fear of it afterwards; for it is not with this sin as it is with other sins; other sins grow to their full strength by degrees, their first motions are the weakest; but this sin is born in its full strength, it is strongest at first; withstand it then, and it falls before you. Thus learn to keep your hearts when provocations arise.

## **Keeping the Heart When the Hour of Temptation Comes**

Season 9. The ninth season of exerting our greatest diligence, 'Is the critical hour of temptation, wherein Satan lays close siege to the fortroyal of a Christian's heart, and often surprizes it for want of watchfulness: to keep the heart now, is no less a mercy than a duty; few Christians are so well skilled in detecting the fallacies, and retorting the arguments by which Satan uses to draw them to sin, as to come off safe in those encounters. "Watch and pray (saith our Lord) lest ye enter into temptation," Mark 14:38.' Even an eminent David, and a wise Solomon, have smarted for their carelessness, at such a time as this. The ninth case therefore shall be this,

Case 9. How a Christian, when strongly solicited by the devil to sin, may keep his heart from yielding to the temptation.

Now there are six special arguments by which Satan subtilly insinuates and winds in the temptation; in all which I shall offer thee some help for the keeping of thy heart; and the first is this:

### **Arguments**

Argument 1. The first argument is drawn from the pleasure of sin: O (saith Satan) here is pleasure to be enjoyed: the temptation comes with a smiling countenance, and charming voice: what, art thou so phlegmatic and dull a soul, as not to feel the powerful charms of pleasure? Who can withhold himself from such delights?

Now thine heart may be kept from the danger of this temptation, by retorting this argument of pleasure upon the tempter; which is done two ways.

1. Thou tellest me, Satan, that sin is pleasant; be it so: But are the gripes of conscience, and the flames of hell so too? Is it pleasant to feel the wounds and throbs of conscience? If so, why did Peter weep so bitterly? Mat. 26:75. Why did David cry out of broken bones? Psal. 51. I hear what thou sayest of the pleasure of sin, and I have read what David hath said of the terrible effects of sin in his Psalm to bring to remembrance, Psal. 38. ver. 2. "Thine arrows stick fast in

me, and thy hand presseth me sore:" ver. 3. "There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones, because of my sin: ver. 4. "For mine iniquities are gone over mine head as an heavy burden; they are too heavy for me:" ver. 5. "My wounds stink, and are corrupt, because of my foolishness:" ver. 6. "I am troubled, I am "bowed down greatly, I go mourning all the day long:" ver. 7. "My loins are filled with a loathsome disease, and there is no soundness in my flesh," ver. 8. "I am feeble and sore broken, I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart."

Here I see the true face of sin; if I yield to thy temptation, I must either feel these pangs of conscience, or the flames of hell.

2. What talkest thou of the pleasure of sin, when, by experience, I know there is more true pleasure in the mortification, than can be in the commission of sin? O how sweet is it to please God, to obey conscience, to preserve inward peace! To be able to say, in this trial, I have discovered the sincerity of my heart; now I know I fear the Lord, now I see that I truly hate sin. Hath sin any such delight as this? This will choak that temptation.

Arg. 2. The second argument is drawn from the secrecy of sin. O (saith Satan) this sin will never disgrace thee abroad, none shall know it.

This argument may be retorted, and the heart secured thus: thou sayest, none shall know it; but, Satan, canst thou find a place void of the divine presence for me to sin in? Thus Job secured his heart from this temptation, Job 13:4. "Doth he not see my ways, and count all my steps?" Therefore he makes a covenant with his eyes, ver. 1. After the same manner Solomon teacheth us to retort this temptation, Prov. 5:20, 21. "And why my son wilt thou be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger? For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings." What if I hide it from the eyes of all the world for the present? I cannot hide it from God; and the time is at hand, when all the world

shall know it too; for the word assures me, Luke 8:17. "That what now is done in secret, shall be proclaimed as upon the house top." Besides, is not my conscience as a thousand witnesses! Do I owe no reverence to myself? Could the heathen man say, Turpe quid ausurus, te fine, teste time; When thou art tempted to commit sin, fear thyself without any other witness: And shall not I be afraid to sin before mine own conscience, which always hath a reproof in its mouth, or a pen in its hand, to record my most secret actions?

Arg. 3. The third argument by which Satan tempteth to sin is taken from the gain and profit arising out of it; why so nice and scrupulous? it is but to stretch the conscience a little, and thou mayest make thyself: now is thy opportunity!

The heart may be kept from falling into this dangerous snare by retorting the temptation thus: But what a profit will it be, if a man should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Shall I hazard thee for all the good that is in this world? There is an immortal spirit dwelling in this earthly tabernacle, of more value than all earthly things, which must live to all eternity when this world shall lie in white ashes. A soul for which Jesus Christ shed his precious and invaluable blood. I was sent into this world to provide for this soul; indeed God hath also committed to me the care of my body, but, (as\* one happily expresses it) with this difference: a master commits two things to a servant—the child, and the child's clothes; will the master thank the servant, if he plead, I have kept the clothes, but I have neglected the life of the child?

Arg. 4. The fourth argument is drawn from the smallness of the sin; it is but a little one, a small matter, a trifle; who would stand upon such niceties?

This argument may be retorted three ways.

1. But is the majesty of heaven a little one too? If I commit this sin, I must offend and wrong a great God, Isa. 40:15, 16, 17–22.

2. Is there any little hell to torment little sinners in? Are not the least sinners there filled with the fulness of wrath? O there is great wrath treasured up for such as the world counts little sinners.

3. The less the sin, the less the inducement to commit it: What, shall I break with God for a trifle? Destroy my peace, wound my conscience, grieve the spirit, and all this for nothing? O what madness is this!

Arg. 5. A fifth argument is drawn from the grace of God, and hopes of pardon: Come, God will pass by this as an infirmity, he will not be extreme to mark it;

But stay, my heart;

1. Where do I find a promise of mercy to presumptuous sinners? Indeed for involuntary surprisal, unavoidable and lamented infirmities, there is a pardon of course; but where is the promise to a daring sinner that sins upon presumption of pardon? Pause a while, my soul, upon that scripture, Numb. 15:27–30. "And if a soul sin through ignorance, then he shall bring a she-goat of the first year for a sin-offering, &c. But the soul that doth ought presumptuously, the same reproacheth the Lord, and that soul shall be cut off from among his people."

2. If God be a God of so much mercy, how can I abuse so good a God? shall I take so glorious an attribute as the mercy of God is, and abuse it unto sin? Shall I wrong him because he is good? Or should not rather the goodness of God lead me to repentance? Rom. 2:4. "There is mercy with thee that thou mayest be feared," Psal. 130:4.

Arg. 6. Lastly, Sometimes Satan encourages to sin from the examples of good and holy men; thus and thus they have sinned and been restored, therefore this may consist with grace, and thou be saved

nevertheless. The danger of this temptation is avoided, and the heart secured, by retorting the argument these three ways:

1. Though good men may commit the same sin materially, which I am tempted to, yet did ever any good man venture to sin upon such a ground and encouragement as this?

2. Did God record these examples for my imitation, or for my warning? Are they not set up as sea-marks, that I might avoid the rocks upon which they split? 1 Cor. 10:6. "Now these were our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted."

3. Am I willing to feel what they felt for sin? O, I dare not follow them in the ways of sin! quia me vestiga terrent; Lest God should plunge me into the deeps of horror, into which he cast them.

Thus learn to keep your hearts in the hour of temptation to sin.

## **Keeping the Heart in the Time of Doubting and Spiritual Darkness**

Season 10. "The tenth special season to keep the heart with all diligence, is the time of spiritual darkness and doubting, when it is with the soul as it was with Paul in his dangerous voyage, neither sun, nor moon, nor star appears for many days: When by reason of the hidings of God's face, the prevalency of corruption, and the inevidence of grace, the soul is even ready to give up all its hopes and comforts for lost; to draw sad and desperate conclusions upon itself; to call its former comforts vain delusions; its grace hypocrisy. When the serene and clear heavens are overcast with dark clouds, yea, filled with thunders and horrible tempests, when the poor pensive soul sits down and weeps forth this sad lamentation, "My hope is perished from the Lord!" Now to keep the heart from sinking in such a day as

this, to enable it to maintain its own sincerity, is a matter of great difficulty. The tenth case then will be this:'

Case 10. How the people of God, in dark and doubting seasons, may keep their hearts from entertaining such sad conclusions about their estates, as destroy their peace, and unfit them for their duty.

There are two general heads to which the grounds of doubting our sincerity may be reduced. (1.) God's carriage towards the soul, either in the time of some extraordinary affliction, or of some long and sad desertion. Or, (2.) The soul's carriage towards God: And here it usually argues against the truth of its own graces, either (1.) From its relapses into the same sins from which it had formerly risen with shame and sorrow. Or, (2.) From the sensible declining of its affections from God. Or, (3.) From the excess of the affections towards creature-comforts and enjoyments. Or, (4.) From its enlargements in public, and often straitenings in private duties. Or, (5.) From some horrid injections of Satan, with which the soul is greatly perplexed. Or, lastly, From God's silence and seeming denial of its long depending suits and prayers.

These are the common grounds of those sad conclusions: Now in order to the establishment and support of the heart in this condition, it will be necessary,

1. That you be acquainted with some general truths, which have a tendency to the settlement of a trembling and doubting soul.
2. That you be rightly instructed about the forementioned particulars, which are the grounds of your doubting.

The general truths requisite for poor doubting souls to be acquainted with, are these:

1. That every working and appearance of hypocrisy doth not presently prove the person in whom it is, to be an hypocrite. You must carefully distinguish between the presence and predominancy



of hypocrisy: There are remains of deceitfulness in the best hearts; David and Peter had sad experience of it; yet the standing frame and general bent of the heart being upright, it did not denominate them hypocrites.

2. That we ought as well to hear what can be said for us as against us: It is the sin of upright hearts sometimes to use an over-rigid, and merciless severity against themselves: They do not indifferently consider the case of their own souls: It is in this case, as Solomon speaks in another, Prov. 12:7. "There is that maketh himself rich, and yet hath nothing; and there is that maketh himself poor, and yet hath great riches." It is the damning sin of the self-flattering hypocrite, to make his condition better than it is: And it is the sin and folly of some upright ones, to make their condition worse than indeed it is. Why should you be such enemies to your own peace? To read over the evidences of God's love to your souls, as a man doth a book which he intends to confute? Why do you study to find evasions, to turn off those comforts which are due to you? It is said of Joseph, that he was minded to put away his espoused Mary, not knowing that that holy thing which was conceived in her, was by the Holy Ghost: And this may be your case. And a third truth is this:

3. That many a saint hath charged and condemned himself for that, which God will never charge him with, nor condemn him for. "Why hast thou hardened our hearts from thy fear," (saith the church) Isa. 63:17 and yet the verse before manifests, that their hearts were not so hardened: Godly Bradford wrote himself an hypocrite, a painted sepulchre; yet doubtless God acquitted him of that charge.

4. Every thing which is a ground of grief to the people of God, is not a sufficient ground of questioning their sincerity. There are many more things to trouble you, than there are to stumble you: If upon every slip and failing through infirmity, you should question all that ever was wrought upon you, your life must be made up of doubtings and fears: You can never attain a settled peace, nor live that life of praise and thankfulness, the gospel calls for.

5. The soul is not at all times fit to pass judgment upon its own condition: To be sure in the dark day of desertion, when the soul is benighted; and in the stormy day of temptation, when the soul is in a hurry, it is utterly unfit to judge its estate; "Examine your hearts upon your beds, and be still," Psal. 4. This is rather a season for watching and resisting, than for judging and determining.

6. That every breach of peace with God, is not a breach of covenant with God. The wife hath many weaknesses and failings, often grieves and displeases her husband; yet in the main is faithful, and truly loves him: These failings may cause him to alter his carriage, but not to withdraw his love, or deny his relation. "Return, O backsliding Israel, for I am married unto you."

7. Lastly, Whatever our sin, or trouble be, it should rather drive us to God, than from God. "Pardon my sin for it is great," Psal. 25:11. Suppose it be true, that thou hast so and so sinned, that thou art thus long and sadly deserted: Yet it is a false inference, that therefore thou shouldest be discouraged, as if there were no help for thee in thy God. When you have well digested these seven establishing truths, if still the doubt remain, then consider what may be replied to the particular grounds of these doubts. As,

1. You doubt, and are ready to conclude, the Lord hath no regard or love for your souls, because of some extraordinary affliction which is come upon you: But I would not have thy soul so to conclude, till thou be able satisfactorily to answer these three questions.

## **Questions**

Question 1. If great troubles and afflictions be marks of God's hatred, why should not impunity and constant prosperity be tokens of his love? For *contrariorum contraria est ratio & consequentia*? of contrary things, there is a contrary reason and consequence: But is this so indeed? or saith not the scripture quite otherwise? Prov. 1:32. "The prosperity of fools destroys them." So Psal. 37:5.

Quest. 2. Dare I draw the same conclusion upon all others that have been as much, yea, more afflicted than myself? If this argument conclude against thee, then so it doth against every one in thy condition; yea, the greater the affliction of any child of God hath been, the more strongly the argument still concludes: And then woe to David, Job, Heman, Paul, and all that have been afflicted as they were.

Quest. 3. Had God exempted you only from those troubles, which all other his people feel, would not that have been a greater ground of doubting to you than this? Especially since the scripture saith, Heb. 12:8. "If ye be without chastening, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons."

Oh, how is our Father put to it by froward children! If he afflicts, then one cries, he loves me not: If he exempt from afflictions, others question his love upon that ground. Surely you have other work to do, under the rod, than this.

2. Or do you rashly infer, the Lord hath no love for you, because he hides his face from you; that your condition is miserable, because dark and uncomfortable? Before you draw such rash conclusions, see what answer you can give to these four following queries.

## **Queries**

Query 1. If any action of God towards his people will bear a favourable, as well as a harsh and severe construction, why should not his people interpret it in the best sense? And is not this such? May he not have a design of love, as well as of hatred, in this dispensation? May he not depart for a season, and not for ever? Yea, that he might not depart for ever. You are not the first that have mistaken God's ends in desertion. Isa. 49:14. "Sion said, the Lord hath forsaken me, my God hath forgotten me:" Was it so indeed? Nothing less. Ver. 15. "Can a mother forget," &c.

Query 2. Do you find the marks of an absolute, total and final desertion upon your own spirits, that you are so apt to conclude yours to be such? Do you find your hearts inclined to forsake God? Have you lost your conscientious tenderness in point of sin? If so, sad characters appear upon you indeed; but if in this dark hour you are as tender of sin as ever, as much resolved to cleave to God as ever; I cannot, I will not forsake God, let him do what he will with me: O no, I cannot. If your hearts work thus, it can be but a partial, limited, and temporary desertion; by this he still keeps his interest in your hearts, a sure sign he will return, and visit you again.

Query 3. Is sense and feeling a competent judge of God's actions and designs? Or may a man safely rely upon its testimony, after so many discoveries of the infallibility of it? Is this a sound argument? If God had any love for my soul, if it were not quite gone, I should feel it now, as well as in former times; but I cannot feel it, therefore it is quite gone. Do you not know the sun still keeps on his course in the heavens, even in dull and close weather, when you cannot see it? And may it not be so with the love of God? Read Isa. 50:10. May not I as well conclude in winter, when the flowers have hid their beautiful heads under ground, they are quite dead and gone, because I cannot find them in December where I saw them in May?

Query 4. Think you the Lord cares not to break his children's hearts, and his own promise too? Hath he no more regard to either? If he return no more, these must be the consequents, Isa. 57:16, 17. Heb. 13:5.

Well, then, from God's carriage towards you, either in affliction, or desertion, no such discouraging, heart-sinking conclusions can be inferred. Next, let us see whether they may not be inferred from our carriage towards God; and here the principal grounds of doubting are such as these;

1. I have fallen again into the same sin from which I have formerly risen with repentance and resolution; therefore my sinning is

customary sinning; a spot that is not the spot of God's children. Hence the upright soul trembles; upon this it is ready to affirm, that all its former humiliations for, and oppositions unto sin, were but acts of hypocrisy. But stay, poor trembling heart.

## Queries

Query 1. If this be so, how comes it to pass that Christ put such a favourable construction upon the disciples sleeping the third time, when he had as often reproved them for it? Mat. 26:40, 41. and how is it that we find in scripture so many promises made to God's people, not only upon their first sins, but upon their backslidings also? Jer. 3:22. Hos. 14:4.

Query 2. Is not your repentance and care renewed as often as your guilt is renewed? Yea, the oftener you sin, the more you are troubled; it is not so in customary sinning, the rise whereof\* Bernard excellently discovers. 1. (Saith he) When a man accustomed to good, sinneth grievously, it seems insupportable, yea, he seems to descend alive into hell. 2. In process of time it seems not insupportable, but heavy: and betwixt insupportable and heavy, there is no small descent.

3. Next it becomes light, his conscience smites but faintly, and he feels not the stripes of it. 4. Then there is not only a total insensibleness of it, but that which was bitter and displeasing is now become sweet and pleasing, in some degree. 5. Then it is turned into custom, and not only pleases, but daily pleases. Lastly, Custom is turned into nature; he cannot be pulled away from it, but defends and pleads for it: This is customary sinning, this is the way of the wicked; but the quite contrary is your condition.

Query 3. Are you sure, from scripture-grounds, that good men may not relapse again and again into the same sin? It is true, as for gross sins, they do not use to relapse into them: David committed adultery no more: Paul persecuted the church no more: Peter denied Christ

no more: But I speak of ordinary infirmities. Job's friends were good men, yet (saith he) chap. 19:3. "These ten times have ye reproached me." So then, no such conclusions follow from this first ground of doubting.

2. The second ground is the declining and withering of our affections to spiritual things? O! (saith the upright soul) if ever I had been planted a right seed, I should have been as a green olive tree in the house of my God; but my branches wither, therefore my root is naught. But stay,

## **Queries**

Query 1. May you not be mistaken about the decay of grace, and fading of your affections? What if they are not so quick and ravishing as at first, may not that be recompensed in the spirituality and solidity of them now? Phil. 1:9. "I pray God your love may abound more and more in all judgment:" It may be more solid, though not so fervent; or do not you mistake by looking forward to what you would be, rather than backward to what once you were? It is a good note of Ames, we discern the growth of grace, as the growth of plants, which we perceive rather *Crevisse quam crescere*, to have grown, than to grow.

Query 2. But grant it be so indeed, as you affirm, must it needs follow, that the root of the matter is not in you? David's last ways are distinguished from his first, 2 Chron. 17:3 and yet both first and last a holy man. The church of Ephesus is charged by Christ for leaving her first love, and yet a golden candlestick, many precious saints in that church, Rev. 2:2, 3, 4.

3. A third ground of these sad conclusions is, the excess of your affections to some creature-enjoyments. I fear I love the creature more than God; and if so, my love is but hypocritical: I sometimes feel stronger, and more sensible motions of my heart to earthly

comforts, than I do to heavenly objects, therefore my soul is not upright in me. But stay, O soul,

## **Queries**

Query 1. May not a man love God more solidly, and strongly, than the creature, and yet his affections to the creature be sometimes moved more violently, and sensibly, than towards God? As rooted malice argues a stronger hatred, than a sudden, though more violent passion: So we must measure our love, not by a violent motion of it, now and then, but by the depth of the root, and constancy of its actings. Because David was so passionately moved for Absalom, Joab concludes, that if he had lived, and all the people died, "it would have pleased him well," 2 Sam. 19:7. But that was argued more like a soldier, than a logician.

Query 2. If you indeed love the creature for itself, if you make it your end, and religion but a means, then the conclusion is rightly drawn upon you. But if you love the creature in reference to God, and see nothing in it separated from him, though sometimes your affections offend in the excess; this is consistent with sincere love to God. To love the creature inordinately, (i.e.) to put it in God's room, and make it a man's end; this is the love of a carnal heart; to love it immoderately, that is, to let out more affection to it than we ought, is sometimes the sin of the best hearts.

Query 3. Have not many souls feared, as you do, that when Christ and creatures shall stand as competitors in some eminent trial, they should forsake Christ rather than the creature; and yet when brought to that dilemma, have been able to cast all the world at their heels for Christ? Many of the martyrs had such fears, and they were satisfied; the prevalency of love is best seen at parting; there may be more love to Christ in thy soul, than thou art now aware of; and if God bring thee to such a pinch, thou mayest see it.

4. A fourth ground of these sad conclusions, is from hence, that we find our hearts sometimes more straitened in private, than in public duties. O! if my soul were sincere, its actings in duty would be uniform. I fear I am but a Pharisee upon this ground. It is sad, indeed, we should at any time find our hearts straitened in private. But,

## **Queries**

Query 1. Do not all thine enlargements in duty, whether public, or private, depend upon the Spirit, who is the Lord of influences; and according as he gives out, or holds back those influences, so art thou enlarged, or straitened? And what if sometimes he pleases to give that in a public, which he withholds in a private duty, as long as thy soul is satisfied in neither, without communion with God, and the straitness of thy heart is indeed its burden? Doth that argue thee to be an hypocrite?

Query 2. Dost thou not make conscience of private duties, and set thyself as before the Lord in them? Indeed, if thou live in the constant neglect, or careless performance of them; if thou art curious about public, and careless about private duties, that would be a sad sign: but when you have conscientiously performed, and often met with God in them, it will not follow that you are insincere, because that communion is sometimes interrupted. Besides,

Query 3. May there not be something, at sometimes, in a public, which is wanting in a private duty, to raise and advantage thine affections? God may sometimes make use of the melting affections of them with whom thou hearest, or prayest, as petty instruments to move thy affections; this advantage is wanting in private; therefore from hence (the case so standing) no such inference can be drawn.

5. Another ground is from those horrid injections of Satan with which the soul is greatly perplexed; by these I may see what an heart I have: Can grace be where those are?



Yes, grace may be where such thoughts are, though not where they are lodged, and consented to. Dost thou cry out under the burden? Enter thy protest in heaven against them, strive to keep up holy and reverend thoughts of God; then it is violence, not a voluntary prostitution.

6. The last ground of these sad conclusions, is the Lord's long silence, and seeming denial of our long depending suits, and prayers. O if God had any regard to my soul, he would have heard my cries before now! But I have no answer from him, therefore no interest in him. But stay, doubting soul,

### **Queries**

Query 1. Have not many saints stumbled upon this stone, before thee? Psal. 31:22. "I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes: nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplication." So the church, Lam. 3:44. "Thou coverest thyself with a cloud, that our prayers should not pass through." Jonah 2:4. "Then said I, I am cast out of thy sight." And may not you be mistaken in this matter, as well as they?

Query 2. Though God's abhorring, and final rejecting prayer, be an argument of his abhorring the person that prays; yet dare we conclude so from a mere suspension of the answer? God may bear long with his own elect, that cry unto him day and night, Luke 18:7.

Query 3. Can you deny but that there are some signs appearing in your souls, even whilst God suspends his answer, that argue your prayers are not rejected by him? As, (1.) Though no answer come, yet you are still resolved to wait: You dare not say as that profane wretch did, 2 Kings 6:33. "This evil is of the Lord, why should I wait for him any longer?" (2.) You can clear and justify God still, and lay the reason and cause of his silence upon yourselves. So did David, Psal. 22:2, 3. "O my God, I cry in the day time, and thou nearest not; and in the night, and am not silent, but thou art holy," &c. (3.) The

suspension of God's answer makes you inquisitive into your own hearts, what evils are there that obstruct your prayers. So the church, Lam. 3:8. "He shutteth out my prayer:" And how doth this work? You may see, ver. 40. Let "us search and try our ways." Well, then, neither from hence may you conclude that God hath no love for your souls.

And thus I have shewn you how to keep your hearts, in a dark and doubting season, from those desperate conclusions of unbelief. God forbid any false heart should encourage itself from these things; it is our unhappiness that when we give. saints and sinners their proper portions, that each of them are so prone to take up the other's part.

## **Keeping the Heart When Sufferings for Religion Come to an Height**

Season 11. The eleventh special season calling for this diligence to keep your hearts, is, when sufferings for religion come to an height, then look to your hearts, Matth. 24:8, 9, 10. "All these are the beginning of sorrows, and they shall deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you; and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake; and then shall many be offended." When sufferings for religion grow hot, then blessed is he that is not of fended in Christ, troubles are then at an height. (1) When a man's nearest friends and relations forsake and leave him, Mic. 7:5, 6. 2 Tim. 4:16. When a man is engaged alone. (2.) When it comes to resisting to blood, Heb. 12:4. (3.) When temptations are presented to us in our sufferings, Heb. 11:37. (4.) When eminent persons for profession turn aside, and desert the cause, of Christ, 2 Tim. 2:19. (5.) When God hides his face in a suffering hour, Jer. 17:17. (6.) When Satan falls upon us with strong temptations, to question the grounds of our sufferings, or the soul's interest in Christ: Now it is hard to keep the heart from turning back, and the steps from declining God's ways." The eleventh question, then, shall be this:

Case 11. How the heart may be kept from relapsing under the greatest sufferings for religion? If the bitterness of sufferings at any time cause thy soul to distaste the way of God, and take up thoughts of forsaking it; stay thine heart under that temptation, by propounding these eight questions solemnly to it.

## Questions

Question 1. What reproach and dishonour shall I pour upon Christ, and religion, by deserting him at such a time as this? This will proclaim to all the world, that how much soever I have boasted of the promises, yet, when it comes to the trial, I dare hazard nothing upon the credit of them: And how will this open the mouths of Christ's enemies to blaspheme? better had I never been born, than that worthy name should be blasphemed through me! Shall I furnish the triumphs of the uncircumcised? Shall I make mirth in hell? O if I did but value the name of Christ, as much as many a wicked man values his own name, I could never endure to see it exposed to such contempt? Will proud dust and ashes venture death, yea, hell, rather than a blot upon their names? And shall I venture nothing to save the honour and reputation of Christ?

Quest. 2. Dare I violate my conscience to save my flesh? Who shall comfort me when conscience wounds me? What comfort is there in life, liberty, or friends, when peace is taken away from the inner man? When Constantius threatened to cut off Samosatenus' righthand, if he would not subscribe somewhat that was against his conscience, he held up both his hands to the messenger that was sent, saying, he shall cut off both, rather than I will do it: Farewell all peace, joy, and comfort, from that day forward. "Had Zimri peace, that slew his master?" said Jezebel. So say I here, had Judas peace? Had Spira peace? And shall you have peace, if you tread in their steps? O consider what you do!

Quest. 3. Is not the public interest of Christ and religion, infinitely more than any private interest of my own? It is a famous passage,

that of Terentius, captain to Adrian the emperor, he presented a petition to Adrian, that the Christians might have a temple by themselves, to worship God apart from the Arians: The emperor tore his petition, and threw it away, bidding him to ask something for himself, and it should be granted. But he modestly gathered up the pieces of his petition again, and told him, 'If he could not be heard in God's cause, he would never ask any thing for himself.' Yea, even Tully, though an heathen could say, *Ne immortalitatem quidem contra rempublicam*; he would not accept even of immortality itself, against the common-wealth. O if we had more public, we should not have such cowardly spirits!

Quest. 4. Did Jesus Christ serve me so, when, for my sake, he exposed himself to far greater sufferings than can be, before me? His sufferings were great indeed, he suffered from all hands, in all his offices, in every member, not only in his body, but in his soul; yea, the sufferings of his soul were the very soul of his sufferings: Witness the bloody sweat in the garden; witness that heart-melting, and heaven-rending out-cry upon the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And yet he flinched not, "he endured the cross, despising the shame." Alas! what are my sufferings compared with Christ's? He hath drank up all that vinegar and gall that would make my sufferings bitter. When one of the martyrs was asked why he was so merry at his death? O, said he, it is because the soul of Christ was so heavy at his death. Did Christ bear such a burden for me, with unbroken patience, and constancy; and shall I shrink back from momentary, and light afflictions, for him?

Quest. 5. Is not eternal life worth the suffering of a moment's pain? If I suffer with him, I shall reign with him. O how will men venture life and limb for a fading crown, swim through seas of blood to a throne! and will I venture nothing? suffer nothing for the crown of glory that fadeth not away? My dog will follow my horse's heels from morning to night, take many a weary step through mire and dirt, rather than leave me, though at night all he gets by it is but bones, and blows: If my soul had any true greatness, any sparks of generosity in it, how

would it despise the sufferings of the way, for the glory of the end? how would it break down all difficulties before it? whilst, by an eye of faith, it sees the forerunner, who is already entered, standing, as it were, upon the walls of heaven, with the crown in his hand, saying, "He that over-cometh shall inherit all things." Come on, then, my soul, come on, there is eternal life laid up for them that, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, Rom. 2:7.

Quest. 6. Can I so easily cast off the society and company of the saints, and give the right-hand of fellowship to the wicked? How can I part with such lovely companions as these have been? How often have I been benefited by their counsels? Ezra 10:3 how often refreshed, warmed, and quickened by their company? Eccl. 4:10, 11 how often have I fasted and prayed with them? What sweet counsel have I taken with them, and gone to the house of God in company? And shall I now shake hands with them, and say, Farewell all ye saints for ever; I shall never be among you more: Come drunkards, swearers, blasphemers, persecutors, you shall be my everlasting companions? O rather let my body and soul be rent asunder, than that ever I should say thus to the excellent of the earth, in whom is all my delight.

Quest. 7. Have I seriously considered the terrible scripture-comminations against backsliders? O my heart! darest thou turn thy back upon the very point of such threatenings as these? Jer. 17:5, 6. "Thus saith the Lord, cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm; and whose heart departeth from the Lord; for he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh," i.e. The curse of God shall wither him root and branch. And Heb. 10:26, 27. "If we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." And again, ver. 38. "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him:" As if he should say, "Take him, world, take him, devil, for your own, I have no delight

in him.' O who dare draw back when God has hedged up the way with such terrible threats as these!

Quest. 8. Can I look Christ in the face at the day of judgment if I desert him now?

"He that is ashamed of me and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels," Mark 8:38. Yet a little while, and you shall see the sign of the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory; the last trump shall sound, the dead, both small and great, even all that sleep in the dust shall awake, and come before that great white throne, on which Christ shall sit in that day. And now do but imagine thou sawest the trembling knees and quivering lips of guilty sinners; imagine thou heardest the dreadful sentence of the Judge upon them, "Go, ye cursed," &c. and then a cry. Oh! the weeping, wailing, and wringing of hands, that there shall be Wouldst thou desert Christ now, to protract a poor, miserable life on earth? If the word of God be true, if the sayings of Christ be sealed and faithful, this shall be the portion of the apostate. It is an easy thing to stop the mouth of conscience now, but will it be easy to stop the mouth of the Judge then? Thus keep thy heart that it depart not from the living God.

## **Keeping the Heart When Sickness Warns of Death Approaching**

Season 12. The twelfth season of looking diligently to our hearts and keeping them with greatest care, is the time of sickness: 'When a child of God draws nigh to eternity, when there are but a few sands more in the upper part of his glass to run down; now Satan, busily bestirs himself; of him it may be said, as of the natural serpent, *nunquam nisi moriens producit in longum*; he is never seen at his full length till dying: And now his great design, since he cannot win the soul from God, is to discourage, and make it unwilling to go to

God, though the gracious soul, with Jacob, should then rouse up itself upon a dying bed, and rejoice that the marriage-day of the Lamb is now almost come; though it should then say, with dying Austin, *vivere renuo ut Christo vivam*; I despise life to be with Christ. Or as dying Milius, when one asked him, whether he were willing to die? O said he, *illus est nolle mori, qui nolit ire ad Christum*; let him be unwilling to die who is unwilling to go to Christ. But O! what shrinking from death? What lothness to depart, may sometimes (indeed too frequently) be observed in the people of God? How loth are some of them to take death by the cold hand? If such a liberty were indulged to us, not to be dissolved till we dissolve ourselves; when should we say with St. Paul, "I desire to be dissolved?" Well then, the last case shall be this.

Case 12. How the people of God, in times of sickness, may get their hearts loose from all earthly engagements, and persuade them into a willingness to die.

And there are seven arguments, which I shall urge upon the people of God at such a time as this, to make them cheerfully entertain the messengers of death, and die as well as well as live, like saints. And the first is this:

### **Arguments**

Argument 1. First, The harmlessness of death to the people of God. Though it keep its dart, it hath lost its sting: A saint (to allude to that, Isa. 11:8.) "May play upon the hole of the asp, and put his "hand into the cockatrice's den." Death is the cockatrice, or asp, the grave is his hole or den; a saint need not fear to put his hand boldly into it: It hath left and lost its sting in the sides of Christ, 1 Cor. 15:55. "O death! where is thy sting?" Why art thou afraid, O saint, that this sickness may be thy death, as long as thou knowest that the death of Christ is the death of death? Indeed, if thou didst die in thy sins, as John 8:21 if death, as a king, did reign over thee, Rom. 5:14. If it could feed upon thee, as the lion doth upon the prey he hath taken,

as Psalm 49:14. If "hell followed the pale horse," as it is, Rev. 6:1 then thou mightest well startle and shrink back from it; but when God hath put away thy sins from thee, "as far as the east is from the west," Psal. 103:12 as long as there is no other evil left in death for thee to encounter with but bodily pain; as long as the scriptures represent it to thee under such harmless and easy notions, as the putting off thy clothes, 2 Cor. 5:2. "And lying down to sleep upon thy bed," Isa. 57:2. Why shouldst thou be afraid? There is as much difference betwixt death to the people of God, and others, as betwixt the unicorn's horn, when it is upon the head of that fierce beast, and when it is in the apothecary's shops, where it is made salubrious and medicinal.

Arg. 2. Thy heart may be kept from shrinking back at such a time as this, by considering the necessity of death, in order to the full fruition of God.

Whether thou art willing to die or no, I assure thee there is no other way to obtain the full satisfaction of thy soul, and complete its happiness; till the hand of death do thee the kind office to draw aside the curtain of the flesh, thy soul cannot see God: This animal life stands betwixt him and thee, 2 Cor. 5:6. "Whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord." Thy body must be refined and cast into a new mould, else that new wine of heavenly glory would break it. Paul, in his highest rapture, 2 Cor. 12:4 when he heard things unutterable, was then but as a stander-by, a looker-on, not admitted into the company as one of them; but as the angels are in our assemblies, so was Paul in that glorious assembly above, and no otherwise; and yet even for this he must, as it were, be taken out of the body, unclothed for a little time, to have a glimpse of that glory, and then put on his clothes again. O then! who would not be willing to die for a full sight and enjoyment of God? Methinks thy soul should look and sigh, like a prisoner, through the grates of this mortality: "O that I had wings like a dove, then would I fly away, and be at rest:" Most men need patience to die, but a saint that understands what death admits him to, should rather need patience to live; methinks he should often look out, and listen on a death-bed



for his Lord's coming; and when he receives the news of his approaching change, should say, "The voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh leaping over the mountains, skipping upon the hills," Cant. 2:8.

Arg. 3. Another argument persuading to this willingness, is the immediate succession of a more excellent and glorious life.

It is but a wink, and you shall see God: Your happiness shall not be deferred till the resurrection; but as soon as the body is dead, the gracious soul is swallowed up in life, Rom. 8:10, 11. When once you have loosed from this shore, in a few moments, your souls will be wafted over upon the wings of angels to the other shore of a glorious eternity. Phil. 1:23. "I desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ." Did the soul and body die together, as Berilius taught; or did they sleep till the resurrection, as others have groundlessly fancied; it had been a madness for Paul to desire a dissolution for the enjoyment of Christ: For if this were so, he enjoyed more of Christ whilst his soul dwelt in its fleshly tabernacle, than he should out of it.

There are but two ways of the soul's living, known in scripture, viz. the life of faith, and the life of vision, 1 Cor. 5:5. Those two divideth all time, both present and future, betwixt them, 1 Cor. 13:12. If when faith fails, sight should not immediately succeed, what would become of the unbodied soul? But blessed be God, this great heart-establishing truth is evidently revealed in scripture, Luke 23:43. You have Christ's promise, John 14:3. "I will come and receive you to myself." O what a change will a few moments make upon your condition? Rouse up, dying saint; when thy soul is come out a little further; when it shall stand like Abraham at its tent-door, the angels of God shall soon be with it: the souls of the elect are, as it were, put out to the angels to nurse, and when they die, these angels carry them home again to their Father's house: if an angel were caused to fly swiftly to bring a saint the answer of his prayer, Dan. 9:22 how much more will the angels come post from heaven to receive and transfer the praying soul itself?

Arg. 4. Farther, It may much conduce to thy willingness to die, to consider, that by death, God oftentimes hides his people out of the way of all temptations and troubles upon earth, Rev. 14:13. "Write, from henceforth, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord." It is God's usual way, when some extraordinary calamities are coming upon the world, to set his people out of harm's way before-hand, Isa. 57:1. "Merciful men are taken away from the evil to come." So Mic. 7:2 when such an evil time comes as is there described, "That they all lie in wait for blood, and every man hunts his brother with a net:" God, by an act of favour, houses his people beforehand. Dost thou know what evil may be in the earth, which thou art so loth to leave? Thy God removes thee for thy great advantage; thou art disbanded by death, and called off the field; other poor saints must stand to it, and endure a great fight of afflictions.

It is observed that Methuselah died the very year before the flood; Augustine, a little before the sacking of Hippo; Pareus, just before the taking of Heidelburgh: Luther observes, that all the apostles died before the destruction of Jerusalem: and Luther himself died before the wars broke out in Germany. It may be the Lord sees thy tender heart cannot endure to see the misery, or bear the temptations that are coming, and therefore will now gather thee to thy grave in peace; and yet wilt thou cry, O spare me a little longer!

Arg. 5. If yet thy heart hang back, consider the great advantage you will have by death, above all that ever you enjoyed on earth; and that, (1.) As to your communion with God: (2.) As to your communion with saints.

1. For your communion with God: the time of perfecting that is now come: thy soul shall shortly stand before the face of God, and have the immediate emanations and beamings forth of his glory upon it: here thy soul is remote from God, the beams of his glory strike it but obliquely and feebly, but shortly it will be under the line, and there the sun shall stand still, as it did in Gibeon; there shall be no

cloudings, nor declinings of it. O how should this fill thy soul with desires of being unclothed!

2. As for the enjoyment of saints, here indeed we have fellowship with them of the lower form; but that fellowship is so dissweetened by remaining corruptions, that there is no satisfaction in it; as it is the greatest plague that can befall an hypocrite to live in a pure church, so it is the greatest vexation to the spirit of a saint, to live in a corrupt and disordered church; but when death hath admitted you into that glorious assembly of the spirits of just men made perfect, you shall have the desire of your hearts; here you cannot fully close with another; yea, you cannot fully close with your own souls. O what discords, jarrings, censurings are here? What perfect, blessed harmony there! In heaven each saint loves another as himself, they are altogether lovely. O my soul, haste thee away from the lion's dens, from the mountains of Bether, from divided saints, to those mountains of myrrh, and hills of frankincense: thou art now going unto thine own people, as the apostle's phrase imports, Cor. 5:8.

Arg. 6. If this will not do, Consider what heavy burdens death will ease thy shoulders of.

In this tabernacle we groan, being burdened, (1.) With bodily distempers; how true do we find that of Theophrastus. The soul pays a dear rent for the tenement it now lives in? But glorified bodies are clogged with no indispositions; death is the best physician; it will cure thee of all diseases at once. (2.) With the indwelling of sin; this makes us groan from the very bowels, Rom. 7:24. "But he that is dead, is free from sin," Rom. 6:7. Hath justification destroyed its damning power, and sanctification its reigning power? So glorification destroys its very being and existence. (3.) We groan under temptations here, but as soon as we are out of the body, we are out of the reach of temptation: when once thou art got into heaven, thou mayest say, Now Satan, I am there where thou canst not come; for as the damned in hell are *malo obformati*, so fixed in sin and misery, that their condition cannot be altered; so glorified saints are

bono confirmati, so fixed in holiness and glory, that they cannot be shaken. (4.) Here we groan under various troubles, and afflictions, but then the days of our mourning are ended. God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes. O then let us haste away, that we may be at rest!

Argument 7. If still thou linger, like Lot in Sodom, then, lastly, examine all the pleas and pretences for a longer time on earth. Why art thou unwilling to die?

## **Objections**

Objection 1. O I have many relations in the world, I know not what will become of them when I am gone.

Solution. If thou art troubled about their bodies, and outward condition, why should not that word satisfy thee, Jer. 49:11. "Leave thy fatherless children to me, I will keep them alive, and let thy widows trust in me." Luther, in his last will and testament, hath this expression, 'Lord, thou hast given me wife and children, I have nothing to leave them, but I commit them unto thee. O Father of the fatherless, and judge of widows, Nutri, serva, doce; nourish, keep, and teach them.' Or, art thou troubled for their souls? Thou canst not convert them, if thou shouldst live, and God can make thy prayers and counsels to live, and take place upon them when thou art dead.

Objection 2. I would fain live to do God more service in the world.

Solution. Well, but if he have no more service for thee to do here, why shouldst thou not say with David, "If he have no delight to use me any farther, here am I, let him do what seemeth him good." In this world thou hast no more to do, but he is calling thee to an higher service and employment in heaven; and what thou wouldst do for him here, he can do that by other hands.

Objection 3. I am not yet fully ready, I am not as a bride, completely adorned for the bridegroom.

Solution. Thy justification is complete already, though thy sanctification be not so; and the way to make it so, is to die; for till then it will have its defects, and wants.

Objection 4. O but I want assurance; if I had that, I could die presently.

Solution. Yea, there it sticks, indeed; but then consider, that an hearty willingness to leave all the world to be freed from sin, and be with God, is the next way to that desired assurance; no carnal person was ever willing to die upon this ground.

And thus I have finished those cases which so nearly concern the people of God, in the several conditions of their life, and taught them how to keep their hearts in all. I shall next apply the whole.

## **I. Use, of Information**

### **A Special Warning to Hypocrites and Formal Professors**

YOU have heard, that the keeping of the heart is the great work of a Christian, in which the very soul and life of religion consists, and without which all other duties are of no value with God: hence, then, I shall infer, to the consternation of hypocrites, and formal professors.

1. That the pains and labours which many persons have taken in religion, are but lost labour and pains, to no purpose, such as will never turn to account.

Many great services have been performed, many glorious works are wrought by men, which yet are utterly rejected by God, and shall never stand upon record, in order to an eternal acceptation, because they took no heed to keep their hearts with God in those duties: this

is that fatal rock, upon which thousands of vain professors have split themselves eternally: they are curious about the externals of religion, but regardless of their hearts. O how many hours have some professors spent in hearing, praying, reading, conferring! and yet, as to the main end of religion, as good they had sat still, and done nothing; for all this signifies nothing, the great work, I mean heart work, being all the while neglected. Tell me, thou vain professor, when didst thou shed a tear for the deadness, hardness, unbelief, or earthliness of thy heart? Thinkest thou such an easy religion can save thee? If so, we may invert Christ's words, and say, "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to life, and many there be that go in thereat." Hear me, thou self-deluding hypocrite, thou that hast put off God with heartless duties, thou that hast acted in religion, as if thou hadst been blessing an idol, that couldst not search and discover thy heart; thou that hast offered to God but the skin of the sacrifice, not the marrow, fat and inwards of it: how wilt thou abide the coming of the Lord? How wilt thou hold up thy head before him, when he shall say, O thou dissembling, false-hearted man! how couldst thou profess religion? With what face couldst thou so often tell me that thou lovedst me, when thou knew all the while, in thine own conscience, that thine heart was not with me? O tremble to think what a fearful judgment it is to be given over to a heedless, and careless heart; and then to have religious duties, instead of a rattle, to quiet and still the conscience!

2. Hence also infer for the humiliation, even of upright hearts, That unless the people of God spend more time and pains about their hearts, than generally and ordinarily they do, they are never like to do God much service, or be owners of much comfort in this world.

I may say of that Christian that is remiss and careless in keeping his heart, as Jacob said of Reuben, "Thou shalt not excel." It grieves me to see how many Christians there are that go up and down dejected, and complaining, that live at a poor low rate, both of service and comfort; and how can they expect it should be otherwise, as long as

they live at such a careless rate? O how little of their time is spent in the closet in searching, humbling, and quickening their hearts?

You say your hearts are dead, and do you wonder they are so, as long as you keep them not with the fountain of life? If your bodies had been dieted as your souls have been, they would have been dead too; never expect better hearts till you take more pains with them: Qui fugit molam, fugit farinam; he that will not have the sweat, must not expect the sweet of religion.

O Christians! I fear your zeal and strength have run in the wrong channel; I fear most of us may take up the Church's complaint, Cant. 1:6. "They have made me the keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept." Two things have eaten up the time and strength of the professors of this generation, and sadly diverted them from heart-work: (1.) Fruitless controversies started by Satan, I doubt not, to this very purpose, to take us off from practical godliness, to make us puzzle our heads when we should be searching our hearts. O how little have we minded that of the apostle, Heb. 13:9. "It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace, and not with meats;" i.e. with disputes and controversies about meats, "which have not profited them that have been occupied therein."

O how much better is it to see men live exactly, than to hear them dispute subtly! These unfruitful questions, how have they rent the churches, wasted time and spirits, and called Christians off from their main business, from looking to their own vineyard? What think ye, sirs? Had it not been better if the questions agitated among the people of God of late days had been such as these? How shall a man discern the special, from the common operations of the Spirit? How may a soul observe its first declinings from God? How may a backsliding Christian recover his first love? How may the heart be preserved from unseasonable thoughts in duty? How may a bosom-sin be discovered, and mortified, &c. would not this have tended more to the credit of religion and comfort of your souls? O it is time to repent and be ashamed of this folly! When I read what Suarez, a

Papist, said, who wrote many tomes of disputations, that he prized the time he set apart for the searching and examining of his heart, in reference to God, above all the time that ever he spent in other studies: I am ashamed to find the professors of this age yet insensible of their folly. Shall the conscience of a Suarez feel a relenting pang for strength and time so ill employed, and shall not yours? This is it your ministers long since warned you of; your spiritual nurses were afraid of the rickets, when they saw our heads only to grow, and our hearts to wither. O when will God beat our swords into plowshares! I mean, our disputes and contentions into practical godliness. (2.) Another cause of neglecting our hearts hath been earthly incumbrances; the heads and hearts of many have been filled with such a croud and noise of worldly business, that they have sadly and sensibly declined and withered in their zeal, love, and delight in God; in their heavenly, serious, and profitable way of conversing with men.

O how hath this wilderness entangled us! our discourses and conferences, nay, our very prayers and duties have a tang of it: we have had so much work without doors, that we have been able to do but little within. It was the sad complaint of an holy one\*, 'O (saith he) it is sad to think how many precious opportunities I have lost; how many sweet motions and admonitions of the Spirit I have passed over unfruitfully, and made the Lord to speak in vain: in the secret illapses of his Spirit, the Lord hath called upon me, but my worldly thoughts did still lodge within me, and there was no place within my heart for such calls of God." Surely there is a way of enjoying God, even in our worldly employments; God would never have put us upon them to our loss; "Enoch walked with God, and begat sons and daughters," Gen. 5:19. He walked with God, but did not retire and separate himself from the things of this life: and the angels that are employed by Christ in the things of this world, (for the spirit of the living creatures is in the wheels) they are finite creatures, and cannot be in a twofold ubi at one time; yet they lose nothing of the beatifical vision all the time of their administration: for Mat. 18:10. "Their angels (even whilst they are employed for them) behold the face of



their Father which is in heaven." We need not lose our visions by our employments, if the fault were not our own. Alas! that ever Christians, who stand at the door of eternity, and have more work upon their hands than this poor moment of interposing time is sufficient for, should yet be filling both their heads and hearts with trifles.

3. Hence I infer for the awakening of all, That if the keeping of the heart be the great work of a Christian, then there are but few real Christians in the world.

Indeed if every one that hath learned the dialect of Christianity, and can talk like a saint: if every one that hath gifts and parts, and by the common assisting presence of the Spirit can preach, pray, or discourse like a Christian; in a word, if such as associate themselves with the people of God, and delight in ordinances, may pass for Christians, the number then is great.

But, alas! to what a small number will they shrink, if you judge them by this rule! how few are there that make conscience of keeping their hearts, watching their thoughts, judging their ends, &c. O there be but few closet men among professors! It is far easier for men to be reconciled to any duties in religion than to these: The profane part of the world will not so much as touch with the outside of religious duties, much less with this; and for the hypocrite, though he be polite and curious about those externals, yet you can never persuade him to this inward work, this difficult work, to which there is no inducement by human applause; this work, that would quickly discover what the hypocrite cares not to know; so that by a general consent, this heart-work is left to the hands of a few secret ones, and I tremble to think in how few hands it is.

## **II. Use, for Exhortation**

# **A Special Encouragement to the People of God**

If the keeping of the heart be so important a business; if such choice advantages accrue to you thereby; if so many dear and precious interests be wrapt up in it, then let me call upon the people of God every where to fall close to this work.

O study your hearts, watch your hearts, keep your hearts! away with fruitless controversies, and all idle questions; away with empty names and vain shews; away with unprofitable discourse and bold censures of others; turn in upon yourselves; get into your closets, and now resolve to dwell there. You have been strangers to this work too long; you have kept others vineyards too long; you have trifled about the borders of religion too long; this world hath detained you from your great work too long; will you now resolve to look better to your hearts? Will you haste and come out of the crowds of business, and clamours of the world, and retire yourselves more than you have done? O that this day you would resolve upon it!

Reader, methinks I should prevail with thee: All that I beg for is but this, that thou wouldst step aside a little oftener to talk with God, and thine own heart; that thou wouldst not suffer every trifle to divert thee; that thou wouldst keep a more true and faithful account of thy thoughts and affections; that thou wouldst but seriously demand of this thy own heart, at least every evening, O my heart, where hast thou been to-day? Whither hast thou made a road today? If all that hath been said by way of inducement be not enough, I have yet more motives to offer you. And the first is this:

## **Ten Motives Exhorting to a Hearty Engagement in Keeping the Heart**

1 Motive. The studying, observing, and diligent keeping of your own hearts, will marvellously help your understanding in the deep mysteries of religion.

An honest well-experienced heart, is a singular help to a weak head; such a heart will serve you instead of a commentary upon a great part of the scriptures: By this means you shall far better understand the things of God, than the learned rabbies and profound doctors (if graceless and unexperienced) ever did; you shall not only have a more clear, but a more sweet perception and gust of them: A man may discourse orthodoxly and profoundly of the nature and effects of faith, the troubles and comforts of conscience, the sweetness of communion with God, that never felt the efficacy and sweet impressions of these things upon his own spirit: but O how dark and dry are these notions, compared with his upon whose heart they have been acted? When such a man reads David's Psalms, or Paul's epistles, there he finds his own objections made and answered. O, saith he, these holy men speak my very heart: Their doubts were mine, their troubles mine, and their experiences mine. I remember Chrysostom, speaking to his people of Antioch about some choice experiences, used this expression: *Sciunt initiati quid dico*: Those that are initiated, know what I say: Experience is the best schoolmaster. O then, study your hearts, keep your hearts!

2 Motive. The study and observation of your own hearts will antidote you against the dangerous and infecting errors of the times and places you live in.

For what think you is the reason that so many professors in England have departed from the faith, giving heed to fables; that so many thousands have been led away by the error of the wicked; that Jesuits and Quakers, who have sown corrupt doctrine, have had such plentiful harvests among us, but because they have met with a company of empty notional professors, that never knew what belongs to practical godliness, and the study of their own hearts.

If professors did but give diligence to study, search and watch their own hearts, they would have that ἰδιον σεβιγγιον, that stedfastness of their own, that Peter speaks of, 1 Pet. 3:17 and this would ballast and settle them, Heb. 13:9. Suppose a subtle Papist should talk to such of the dignity and merit of good works; could he ever work the persuasion of it into that heart that is conscious to itself of so much darkness, deadness, distraction and unbelief, attending its best duties? It is a good rule, Non est disputandum de gustu: There is no disputing against taste. What a man hath felt and tasted, one cannot beat him off from that by argument.

3 Motive. Your care and diligence in keeping your hearts will prove one of the best evidences of your sincerity.

I know no external act of religion that differences the sound from the unsound professor: It is wonderful to consider how far hypocrites go in all external duties; how plausibly they can order the outward man, hiding all their indecencies from the observation of the world.

But then, they take no heed to their hearts; they are not in secret what they appear to be in public: And before this trial no hypocrite can stand. It is confessed they may in a fit, under a pang upon a death-bed, cry out of the wickedness of their hearts; but alas! there is no heed to be taken to these extorted complaints. In our law, no credit is to be given to the testimony of one upon the rack, because it may be supposed that the extremity of the torture may make him say any thing to be eased. But if self-jealousy, care, and watchfulness, be the daily workings and frames of thy heart, it strongly argues the sincerity of it: For what but the sense of a divine eye; what but the real hatred of sin as sin, could put thee upon those secret duties, which lie out of the observation of all creatures?

If then it be a desirable thing in thine eyes to have a fair testimony of thine integrity, and to know of a truth, that thou fearest God; then study thine heart, watch thy heart, keep thy heart.

4 Motive. How fruitful, sweet, and comfortable would all ordinances and duties be to us, if our hearts were better Kept?

O what precious communion might you have with God every time you approach him, if your hearts were but in frame! You might then say with David, Psal. 104:35. "My meditation of him shall be sweet." That which loses all our comforts in ordinances and more secret duties, is the indisposedness of the heart: A Christian whose heart is in a good frame, gets the start of all others that come with him in that duty: They strive hard to get up their hearts to God, now trying this argument upon them, and then that, to quicken and affect them, and sometimes go away as bad as they came: Sometimes the duty is almost ended before their hearts begin to stir or feel any warmth, quickening, or power from it: But all this while the prepared heart is at its work; this is he that ordinarily gets the first sight of Christ in a sermon, the first seal from Christ in a sacrament, the first kiss from Christ in secret prayer. I tell you, and tell you but what I have felt, that prayers and sermons would appear to you other manner of things than they do, did you but bring better ordered hearts unto them; you would not go away dejected and drooping. O this hath been a lost duty to me! if you had not lost your hearts, it had not been so. If then the comfort of ordinances be sweet, look to your hearts, keep your hearts.

5 Motive. Acquaintance with your own hearts would be a fountain of matter to you in prayer.

A man that is diligent in heart-work, and knows the state of his own soul, will have a fountain-fulness of matter to supply him richly in all his addresses to God; his tongue shall not falter and make pause for want of matter; Psal. 45:1. "My heart is inditing a good matter:" Or, as Montanus renders the original, my heart is boiling up good matter, like a living spring, that is still bubbling up fresh water; and then my tongue is as the pen of a ready writer: Others must pump their memories, rack their inventions, and are often at a loss, when they have done all: but if thou have kept, and faithfully studied thine

own heart, it will be with thee (as Job speaks in another case) like bottles full of new wine that want vent, which are ready to burst: As holy matter flows plentifully, so more feelingly and sweetly from such a heart. When a heart-experienced Christian is mourning before God over some special heart-corruption, wrestling with God for the supply of some special inward want, he speaks not as other men do that have learned to pray by rote; their confessions and petitions are squeezed out; his drop freely, like pure honey from the comb: It is a happiness then to be with or near such a Christian. I remember Bernard, having given rules to prepare the heart for prayer, concludes them thus, *Et cum talis fueris, momento mei*; and (saith he) When thy heart is in this frame, then remember me.

6 Motive. By this the decayed power of religion will be recovered again among professors, which is the most desirable state in this world.

O that I might live to see that day, when professors shall not walk in a vain shew, when they shall please themselves no more with a name to live, being spiritually dead! When they shall be no more (as many of them now are) a company of frothy, vain, and unserious persons, but the majestic beams of holiness shining from their heavenly and serious conversation, shall awe the world, and command reverence from all that are about them; when they shall warm the hearts of those that come nigh them, so that men shall say, God is in these men of a truth.

Well, such a time may again be expected, according to that promise, Isa. 60:21. "The people shall be all righteous." But till we pursue closer to this great work of keeping our hearts, I am out of hopes to see those blessed days; I cannot expect better times till God gives better hearts. Doth it not grieve you to see what a scorn religion is made in the world? what objects of contempt and scorn the professors of it are made in the world?

Professors, would you recover your credit? Would you again obtain an honourable testimony in the consciences of your very enemies? Then keep your hearts, watch your hearts: it is the looseness, frothiness, and earthliness of your hearts that have made your lives so; and these have brought you under the contempt of the world; you first lost your sights of God, and communion with him, then your heavenly and serious deportment among men, and by that your interest in their consciences: O then, for the credit of religion, for the honour of your profession keep your hearts!

7 Motive. By diligence in keeping your hearts, we should prevent, and remove the fatal scandals and stumbling-blocks out of the way of the world.

"Woe to the world (saith Christ) because of offences!" Matth. 18:7. Doth not shame cover your faces? Do not your hearts bleed within you, to hear of the scandalous miscarriages of many loose professors? Could you not, like Shem and Japhet, go backward with a garment to cover the shame of many professors? How is that worthy name blasphemed! Jam. 2:7. 2 Sam. 12:13, 14. the hearts of the righteous saddened, Psal. 25:3. Ezek. 36:20. by this the world is fearfully prejudiced against Christ and religion, the bonds of death made fast upon their souls; those that have a general love and liking to the ways of God, startled and quite driven back, and thus soul-blood is shed: woe to the world!

Yea, how are the consciences of fallen professors plunged, and even overwhelmed in the deeps of trouble? God inwardly excommunicating their souls from all comfortable fellowship with himself, and the joys of his salvation: infinite are the mischiefs that come by the scandalous lives of professors.

And what is the true cause and reason of all this, but the neglecting of their hearts? Were our hearts better kept, all this would be prevented. Had David kept his heart, he had not broken his bones: a negligent and careless heart must of necessity produce a disorderly

and scandalous life. I thank God for the freedom and faithfulness of a\* reverend brother, in shewing professors their manifold miscarriages; and from my heart do wish, that when their wounds have been thoroughly searched by that probe, God would be pleased to heal them by this plaister. O professors! if ever you will keep religion sweet; if ever you hope to recover the credit of it in the world, keep your hearts; either keep your hearts, or lose your credit; keep your hearts, or lose your comforts; keep your hearts lest ye shed soul-blood. What words can express the deep concernments, the wonderful consequences of this work! Every thing puts a necessity, a solemnity, a beauty upon it.

8 Motive. An heart well kept will fit you for any condition God casts you into, or any service he hath to use you in.

He that hath learnt how to keep his heart lowly, is fit for prosperity: and he that knows how to use and apply it to scripture-promises and supports, is fit to pass through any adversity: He that can deny the pride and selfishness of his heart is fit to be employed in any service for God. Such a man was Paul, he did not only spend his time in preaching to others, in keeping others vineyards, but he looked to himself, kept his own vineyard; 1 Cor. 9:27. "Lest when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away." And what an eminent instrument was he for God? He could turn his hand to any work; he could dexterously manage both an adverse and prosperous condition: "I know how to abound, and how to suffer want. Let the people deify him, it moves him not, unless to indignation. Let them stone him, he can bear it; If a man purge himself from these (saith he, 2 Tim. 2:21) he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's house, and prepared unto every good work."

First the heart must be purged, and then it is prepared for any service of God. When the heart of Isaiah was purified, which was the thing signified by the touching of his lips with a coal from the altar, Isa. 6:7 then he was fit for God's work: "Here am I, send me," ver. 8. A man that hath not learned to keep his heart, put him upon any



service for God, and if it be attended with honour, it shall swell up and over-top his spirit; if with suffering it will exanimate and sink him.

Jesus Christ had an instrumental fitness for his Father's work above all the servants that ever God employed: he was zealous in public work for God; so zealous, that sometimes he forgot to eat bread, yea, that his friends thought he had been besides himself: but yet he so carried on his public work, as not to forget his own private communion with God: and therefore you read, Mat. 13:23. that when he had been labouring all day, yet, after that he went up to a mountain apart to pray, and was there alone. O let the keepers of the vineyards look to their own vineyard: We shall never be so instrumental to the good of others, as when we are most diligent about our own souls.

9 Motive. If the people of God would more diligently keep their hearts, how exceedingly would the communion of saints be thereby sweetened.

How goodly then would be thy tents, O Jacob! and thy tabernacles, O Israel! Then it is prophesied of the Jews, Zech. 8:23. "Men would say, we will go with you; for we have heard that God is among you." It is the fellowship your souls have with the Father, and with the Son, that draws out the desires of others after fellowship with you, 1 John 1:3. I tell you, if saints would be persuaded to take more pains, and spend more time about their hearts, there would quickly be such a divine lustre upon the face of their conversations, that men would account it no small privilege to be with or near them.

It is the pride, passion, and earthliness of our hearts that have spoiled Christian fellowship. Whence is it, that when Christians meet, they are often jarring and contending? but only from their unmortified passions: whence are their uncharitable censures of their brethren: but only from self-ignorance: Why are they so rigid and unmerciful towards those that are fallen? but because they

consider not themselves as the apostle speaks, Gal. 6:1. Why is their discourse so frothy and unprofitable when they meet? is not this from the earthliness and vanity of their hearts?

My brethren, these be the things that have spoiled Christian fellowship, and made it become a dry and sapless thing; so that many Christians are even weary of it, and are ready to say with the prophet, Jer. 9:2. "O that I had a cottage in the wilderness, &c. that I might leave my people, and go from them!" And with David, Psal. 120:6. "My soul hath long dwelt with them that hate peace." This hath made them long for the grave that they might go from them that are not their own people, to them that are their own people, as the original of that text imports, 2 Cor. 5:8.

But now if professors would study their own hearts more, watch and keep them better, all this would be prevented; and the beauty and glory of communion again restored: they would divide no more, contend no more, censure rashly no more; when their hearts are in tune, their tongues will not jar; how charitable, pitiful, and tender will they be of one another, when every one is daily humbled under the evils of his own heart. Lord, hasten those much-desired days, and bless these counsels in order to them!

10 Motive. Lastly, By this the comforts of the Spirit, and precious influence of all ordinances would be fixed, and much longer preserved in your souls than now they are.

Ah! what would I give, that my soul might be preserved in that frame I sometimes find it in after an ordinance? Aliquando intromittis me, Domine, in affectum multum inusitatim, introrsus ad quam nescio dulcedinem, &c. Sometimes, O Lord, (saith one of the Fathers sweetly) thou admittest me into the most inward, unusual, and sweet delights, to I-know-not-what sweetness, which were it perfected in me, I know not what it would be, or rather, what it would riot be. But alas! the heart grows careless again, and quickly returns, like water removed from the fire, to its native coldness. Could you but keep

those things for ever in your hearts, what Christians would you be? what lives would you live? and how is it that these things remain no longer with us? Doubtless it is because we suffer our hearts to take cold again; we should be as careful after an ordinance or duty to prevent this, as one that comes out of a hot bath, or great sweat, is of going out into the chill air. We have our hot and cold fits by turns: and what is the reason but our unskilfulness and carelessness in keeping the heart?

It is a thousand pities, that the ordinances of God, as to their quickening and comforting effects, should be like those human ordinances the apostle speaks of, that perish in the using. O then, let me say to you, as Job 15:11. "Do the consolations of God seem small to you?" Look over these ten special benefits; weigh them in a just balance: are they small matters? Is it a small matter to have thy weak understanding assisted? Thy endangered soul antidoted, thy sincerity cleared, thy communion with God sweetened, thy sails filled in prayer? Is it a small thing to have the decayed power of godliness again recovered, all fatal scandals removed, an instrumental fitness to serve Christ obtained, the communion of saints restored to its primitive glory, and the influences of ordinances abiding in the souls of saints? If these be no common blessings, no small benefits, then, surely, it is a great duty to keep the heart with all diligence.

### **The III. Use, for Direction**

The next use shall be for direction to some special means for the keeping of the heart. And here, besides what hath been hinted in the explication of the duty at the beginning of this discourse, to which I refer the reader, and all those directions throughout the whole, appropriated to particular cases and seasons; I shall farther add several other general means of excellent use to this end. And the first is this:

1 Mean. Would you thus keep your hearts as hath been persuaded? Then furnish your hearts richly with the word of God, which is their best preservation against sin.

Keep the word, and the word will keep you: as the first receiving of the word regenerated your hearts, so the keeping of the word within you will preserve your hearts: Col. 3:16. "Let the word of Christ dwell richly in you:" let it dwell, not tarry with you for a night, and let it dwell richly or plentifully; in all that is of it, in its commands, promises, threats; in all that is in you, in your understanding, memories, consciences, affections, and then it will preserve your hearts; Psalm 119:11. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." It is the slipperiness of our hearts in reference to the word, that causes so many slips in our lives. Conscience cannot be urged or awed with forgotten truths; but keep it in the heart, and it will keep both heart and life upright; Psalm 37:31. "The law of his God is in his heart: none of his steps shall slide;" or if he do, the word will recover the straying heart again; Mat. 26:75. "Then Peter remembered the word of Jesus, and wept bitterly." We never lose our hearts, till they have first lost the efficacious and powerful impression of the word.

2. Mean. Call your hearts frequently to an account, if ever you mean to keep them with God.

Those that put a stock into the hands of unfaithful or suspicious servants, will be sure to make short reckonings with them; "The heart is deceitful, above all things, and desperately wicked," Jer. 17:9. O it is as necessary as sweet, that we and our reins, that is, we and our secret thoughts, should confer together every night, Psalm 16:7. We should call our hearts to account every evening, and say, O my heart! Where hast thou been to-day? Where have thy thoughts been wandering to-day? What an account canst thou give of them? O naughty heart! vain heart! couldst thou not abide by the fountain of delights? Is there better entertainment with the creature than with God? The oftener the heart meets with rebukes and checks for

wandering, the less it will wander: If every vain thought were retracted with a sigh, every excursion of the heart from God with a severe check, it would not dare so boldly and frequently to digress and step aside: those actions which are committed with reluctancy, are not committed with frequency.

3 Mean. He that will keep his heart, must take heed of plunging himself into such a multiplicity of earthly business, as he cannot manage without neglecting his main business.

It cannot be imagined he should keep his heart with God that hath lost himself in a wood of earthly business: Take heed you do not pinch your souls, by gratifying the immoderate desires of your flesh. I wish many Christians could truly say what an\* heathen once did! 'I do not give, but only lend myself to business.' It is said Germanicus reigned in the hearts of the Romans; Tiberius only in their provinces. Though the world be in your hands, let it not justle Christ out of your hearts.

Take heed, Christian, lest thy shop steal away thy heart from thy closet; God never intended earthly employments for a stop, but rather for a step to heavenly ones. O let not Aristippus the heathen, arise in judgment against thee, who said, 'He would rather neglect his means, than his mind; his farm, than his soul.' If thy ship be overladen, thou must cast some overboard: More business than thou canst well manage, is like more meat than thou canst well digest, which will quickly make a sickly soul.

4 Mean. He that means to keep his heart, must carefully observe its first declinings from God, and stop it there.

He that will find his house in good repair, must stop every chink as soon as discovered; and he that will keep his heart, must not let a vain thought be long neglected; the serpent of heart-apostasy is best killed in the egg of a small remission of care. Oh! if many poor decayed Christians had looked to their hearts in time, they had never

come to that sad pass they now are in? We may say of heart-neglects, as the apostle doth of vain babblings; that they increase to more and more ungodliness. *Nemo repente fit turpissimus*; little sins neglected, will quickly become great and masterless: The greatest crocodile once lay in an egg; the greatest oak was once but an acorn. The firing of a small train of powder may blow up all, by leading to a greater quantity. Men little think what a proud, vain, wanton, or worldly thought may grow to: Behold how great a matter a little fire kindles!

5 Mean. Take heed of losing the liveliness and sweetness of your communion with God, lest thereby your hearts be loosed off from God.

The heart is an hungry and restless thing; it will have something to feed upon; if it enjoy nothing from God, it will hunt for something among the creatures, and there it often loses itself, as well as its end. There is nothing more engages the heart to a constancy and evenness in walking with God, than the sweetness which it tastes therein: As the Gauls, when once they tasted the sweet wine of Italy, could never be satisfied till they conquered the country where it grew.

It is true, conscience of duty may keep the heart from neglecting it; but when there is no higher motive, it drives on deadly, and is filled with distractions; that which we delight in, we are never weary of, as is evident in the motions of the heart to earthly things, where the wheels being oiled with delight, run nimbly, and have often need of trigging; the motions of the heart upwards would be as free, if its delight in heavenly things were as great.

6 Mean. Habituate thy heart to spiritual meditations, if thou wouldst have it free from those burdensome diversions.

By this mean you will get a facility and dexterity in heart-work: It is pity those smaller portions of our time betwixt solemn duties should lie upon our hands, and be rendered useless to us. O learn to save,

and be good husbands upon your thoughts. To this purpose a neat author\* speaks; 'These parentheses, which happen to come between the more solemn passages (whether business or recreations) of human life, are wont to be lost by most men for want of a due value for them, and even by good men, for want of skill to preserve them; for though they do not properly despise them, yet they neglect, or lose them, for want of knowing how to rescue them, or what to do with them: But although grains of sand and ashes be, apart, but of a despicable smallness, and liable to be scattered and blown away, yet the skilful artificer, by a vehement fire, brings numbers of those to afford him that noble substance, glass, by whose help we may both see ourselves, and our blemishes lively represented (as in looking-glasses) and discern celestial objects (as with the telescopes) and with the sun beams kindle disposed materials (as with burning glasses:) So when these little fragments, or parcels of time, which if not carefully looked to, would be dissipated and lost, come to be managed by a skilful contemplator, and to be improved by the celestial fire of devotion, they may be so ordered as to afford us both looking-glasses to dress our souls by, and prospectives to discover heavenly wonders and incentives to inflame our hearts with zeal;' Thus far he.

Something of that nature I have under hand, for a public benefit, if God give life to finish, and opportunity to produce it: Certainly this is a great advantage for the keeping of the heart with God.

## **IV. Use of Consolation**

I shall now close the whole with a word or two of consolation to all diligent and serious Christians, that faithfully and closely ply heart-work; that are groaning and weeping in secret over the hardness, pride, earthliness, and vanity of their hearts; that are fearing and trembling over the experienced deceitfulness and falseness of them, whilst other vain professors eyes are abroad, their time and strength eaten up by fruitless disputes and earthly employments, or, at best,

by a cold and formal performance of some heartless and empty duties. Poor Christian! I have three things to offer thee, in order to thy support and comfort; and, doubtless, either of them alone, mixed with faith, is sufficient to comfort thee over all the trouble thou hast with thine own heart.

1. Comfort. This argues thy heart to be upright and honest, whatever thy gifts and abilities are.

It is uprightness of heart will comfort thee upon a death-bed; 2 Kings 20:2, 3. "Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed to the Lord, saying, remember now, O Lord, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart," &c.

I am really of his mind, who said, *si mihi daretur optio, eligerim Christiani rustici sordidissimum & maxime agreste opus præ omnibus victoriis & triumphis Alexandri aut Cæsaris*; might I have my wish, I would prefer the most despicable and sordid work of a rustic Christian, before all the victories and triumphs of Alexander or Cæsar; yea, let me add, before all the elaborated duties and excellent gifts of vain professors; before the tongues of men and angels. It will signify more to my comfort, to spend one solitary hour in mourning before the Lord over heart-corruption, than many hours in a seeming zealous, but really dead performance of common duties with the greatest enlargements and richest embellishments of parts and gifts.

By this very thing Christ distinguishes the formal and serious Christian, Matth. 6:5. The one is for the street and synagogue, for the observation and applause of men, but the other is a closet-man, he drives on a home-trade, a heart-trade. Never be troubled then for the want of those things that a man may have and be eternally damned; but rather bless God for that which none but the favourites and darlings of heaven have. Many a one is now in hell that had a better head than mine; and many a one now in heaven that complained of as bad a heart as thine.



2 Comfort. Know further for thy comfort, that God would never leave thee under so many heart-troubles and burdens if he intended not thy real benefit thereby.

Thou art often crying out, Lord! why is it thus? Why go I-mourning all the day, having sorrow in my heart? Thus long have I been exercised with hardness of heart, and to this day have not obtained a broken heart. Many years have I been praying and striving against vain thoughts, yet am still infested and perplexed with them. O when shall I get a better heart! I have been in travail, and brought forth but wind; I have obtained no deliverance, neither have the corruptions of my heart fallen. I have brought this heart many times to prayers, sermons and sacraments, expecting and hoping for a cure from them, and still my sore runneth, and ceaseth not.

Pensive soul! Let this comfort thee; thy God designs thy benefit, even by these occasions of thy sad complaints. For (1.) Hereby he would let thee see what thy heart by nature is and was, and therein take notice how much thou art beholden to free grace. He leaves thee under these exercises of spirit, that thou mayest lie, as with thy face upon the ground, admiring that ever the Lord of glory should take so vile a creature into his bosom. Thy base heart, if it be good for nothing else, yet serves to commend and set off the unsearchable riches of free grace. (2.) This serves to beat thee off continually from resting, yea, or but glancing upon thine own righteousness or excellency. The corruption of thy heart, working in all thy duties, makes thee sensible to feel that the bed is too short, and the covering too narrow. Were it not for those reflections thou hast after duties, upon the dulness and distractions of thine heart in them; how apt wouldst thou be to fall in love with, and admire thine own performances and enlargements? For if notwithstanding these, thou hast much to do with the pride of thy heart, how much more; if such humbling and self-abasing considerations were wanting. And, lastly, this tends to make thee the more compassionate and tender towards others: Perhaps thou wouldst have little pity for the distresses and soul-troubles of others, if thou hadst less experience of thine own.

3 Comfort. To conclude; God will shortly put a blessed end to all these troubles, cares and watchings.

The time is coming, when thy heart shall be as thou wouldst have it; when thou shalt be discharged of all these cares, fears, and sorrows, and never cry out, O my hard, my proud, my vain, my earthly heart any more! When all darkness shall be vanished from thine understanding; and thou shalt clearly discover all truths in God, that crystal ocean of truth: When all vanity shall be purged perfectly out of thy thoughts, and they be everlastingly, ravishingly, and delightfully entertained and exercised upon that supreme goodness,, and infinite excellency of God, from whom they shall never start any more like a broken bow. And as for thy pride, passion, earthliness, and all other the matters of thy complaint and trouble, it shall be said of them, as of the Egyptians to Israel, "Stand still, and see the salvation of God." These corruptions thou seest to day, henceforth thou shalt see them no more for ever! when thou shalt lay down thy weapons of prayers, tears, and groans, and put on the armour of light, not to fight, but triumph in.

Lord! when shall this blessed day come? How long! how long! holy and true? My soul waiteth for thee! Come, my Beloved! and be thou like a roe, or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether. Amen.

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